The North American Review

PERIODICAL

BURLINGTON

The Nun Who Came In From The Cold

The Portable D. L. Marston

The Thief

When The Two-Wheeler Was King

The Delta Tractor Driver And Mr. Charley

On The Necessity For Hollywood

Fiction, Poetry, Departments, and Reviews

Volume 251/5 *September, 1966* *$1.00*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Fabulist

THE GOOSE AND THE FARM BUREAU EXPERT

A farmer had a goose that laid golden eggs. The government, hearing of this, sent out a Farm Bureau Expert who advised the farmer to kill the goose and get his gold in a lump sum. But inside the dead goose there was merely blood and guts.

"You have given me stupid advice," said the farmer. "If I had not listened to you I would be rich. Who can replace my goose?"

"Perhaps I can," said the Farm Bureau Expert. Thereupon he laid a golden egg himself.

The farmer stared at the egg in amazement. "How is it possible?" he asked.

"It is the most natural thing in the world," said the Farm Bureau Expert. "Laying golden eggs is one of the functions of experts."

"But what about the stupid advice?"

"That is another function."

THE POET AND HIS MUSE

One day a poet was walking in the woods admiring the rocks, trees, flowers, and whatever else poets admire, when suddenly his Muse appeared to him.

"Mortal," she said, "you have courted me for a long time. Day and night you write me love letters. You give me no peace. What do you want?"

"O muse," said the poet, "I don't want much. Give me an advanced degree, a steady income, and a secure academic position. Let my voice be heard at faculty meetings. Let me give readings from time to time to small but appreciative audiences. And let my verse be published in *The North American Review*."

"You are a man after my own heart," said the muse. "Here is a scholarship to the University of Iowa."

THE PRECIOUS PIECE OF WOOD

On the day her son was born, a mother heard the Fates prophesy that her child's life would last only as long as a certain piece of wood burning upon the hearth. She immediately quenched the fire, took out the piece of wood, and hid it in a safe place. All the time her son was growing up she cherished the piece of wood, held it close to her, talked to it at times, and sometimes even kissed it.

Then one day in the natural course of events her son committed an unpardonable outrage against his mother. Enraged, she took out the precious piece of wood and hurled it into the fire. Then she put her head in her hands and wept—not for her son whom she hated, but for the piece of wood that she loved.

Victor Contoski

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

is revived with the cooperation of

The Honorable Claiborne Pell,

Senator from Rhode Island.

ROBERT DANA left in August for a year's respite from his teaching at Cornell College and editing *The North American Review*. Mr. Dana will study Oriental literature at Berkeley, write American poetry, and polish the manuscript of his book which will be published by Norton early in 1967. Knowing he will enjoy himself, we already look forward to his homecoming next fall.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The North American Review

New Series: Volume III No. Five Old Series: Volume 251

September, 1966

CONTENTS

The Fabulist *Inside Front Cover*

Unloading Zone 2

Pot On The Fire 3
- The I's Have It
- R. I. P. Pussycat
- Wife
- Conditions
- Letters Never Mailed Department

Three Poems *John Pauker* 5

The Nun Who Came In From The Cold *Francis Murray* 6

Spring Fever, a poem *Stephen Tudor* 7

The Portable D. L. Marston *Leonard Conversi* 8

The Thief *Joyce Carol Oates* 10

Three Poems *Norman Hoegberg* 14

When The Two-Wheeler Was King *Bill Murphy* 18

The Delta Tractor Driver and Mr. Charlie *Frederick Marshall Finney* 21

The Condemned, a poem *William Childress* 22

Reflections Of A Volunteer Fireman *Ernest Earnest* 22

The Point Of Decision *Albert W. Vogel* 24

The Prodigal, a poem *Patricia Goedicke* 25

What Else Is Wrong With Television *David Sonstroem* 26

On The Necessity For Hollywood *Allan Jay Wagenheim* 28

Escalation Hymn, a poem *Morgan Gibson* 28

George's Place *James Fatka* 29

Williamsburg *Gloria Hackel* 32

Contributors 36

Books 36

Two Poems *Dave Kelly* 37

Staff

Editor:
Robert P. Dana

Managing Editor:
Bernard E. Richardson

Poetry:
Marvin Bell

Copy:
Geneva Meers
Richard Van Fossen

Staff Artist:
Hugh Lifson

Staff:
Dorothy Ellison
David Messman
Jerome Mazzaro
Audrey Borenstein

The North American Review, September, 1966. Old Series Volume 251, New Series Volume III Number Five Published bi-monthly in January, March, May, July, September, November. Publication, Editorial, and General Offices at Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa. $1.00 a copy, $6.00 a year in the U. S.; Canada and Latin America, $6.15; all other countries, $7.00. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelope with return postage. Printed in the U.S.A. by Economy Advertising Company, Iowa City, Iowa. Copyright 1966 by Cornell College. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Entered as second class matter at Mount Vernon, Iowa.

Back file volumes available from University Microfilm, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan & AHS Reprint Co., New York.

Subscribers must notify publisher of failure to receive within six weeks of date of issue.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OP AND POP: THE ULTIMATE POLITIC

Illusion is all.

And Americans, perhaps more than any other people in this century, live in the capital of illusion.

Madison Avenue is the world production center for the half-lie; Hollywood, for the complete lie. And TV which is everywhere, now provides the instant lie, partial or complete, visual, audial, or subliminal.

Politics has not been slow to capitalize on the willingness of party members to be deceived. After all, who knows better than the politician that nations are generated from dreams; and that their citizens, in the main, prefer living in dreams to living in reality. Hence, the increased and increasing emphasis in the last twenty years on *the image* of a political candidate.

Look at the recent record.

Jack Kennedy knew that it wouldn't do him a lick of good to capture the Democratic party machine, if he didn't comb his hair differently, get rid of that devil-may-care, little-boy look. He did, and won.

Barry Goldwater, the cranky king of the Antsy-Pants empire, must have been listening to his advisors early in the game. Remember that marvelous *Life* cover: Barry sans hornrims, in a chambrey shirt, with his palomino? A sort of right-wing Lone Ranger? But after he won the nomination, he got pig-headed and went back to the hornrims. And he made antispeeches in parts of the country where it hurt. He blundered ahead, and lost. Twice.

And foxy-grandpa Lyndon made him look like he wasn't there the second time. The liberal left really went for the Big-Daddy image. They thought they had a candidate who'd footrace Ho Chi Minh to a peace-table anywhere in the world. What they really got was Barry as The Lone Ranger.

So it was only a matter of time before some real princes of make-believe got into the act. After all who knows more about the creation of illusion, the projection of an image, than actors? Doesn't Arthur Godfrey know all about the Air Force? Sammy Davis, Jr. about racial inequality? Joyce Brothers about boxing and children? Mike Wallace about everything? "Celebrities" are the real cream of the dream, the real and only American aristocracy, and they get around.

George Murphy (now the Honorable, from California), the reigning record-holder for the number of grade B films starred-in was the first to throw his boater into the Potomac.

His qualifications? Well, hadn't he played the role of the White House Press Secretary in the Broadway production "Of Thee I Sing?" A 62-year-old ex-hoofer with that kind of experience,the Cal GOP brain-trust must have reasoned, should be able to beat Pierre Salinger who'd only been the real thing. They were right. Murphy won, and the signal flags went up: Look for another actor!

And the Cal GOP found one, of course. Ronald Reagan, who will run against Governor Pat Brown in the upcoming election. Reagan's qualifications for the governorship are ideal: that Apple-Pie American look; experience as a mid-western sports broadcaster (which makes him an expert on strategy), a string of more than twenty grade B movies; and starring roles in *John Loves Mary, The Girl From Jones Beach,* and *Tugboat Annie Sails Again* (everyone remembers those exquisite moments in film history), and in *Knute Rockne — All American* (good for the Catholic vote). A sure-fire image if there ever was one.

Actually, as early as 1947 one might have figured Reagan to run for something. Subbing for Victor Reisel, anti-labor columnist for the old New York *Post,* he wrote "We are violently opposed to indiscriminate Red-baiting but believe that every union in our country must awaken to the menace of Communist party members . . ."

When George Christopher, the former Republican mayor of San Francisco, was sure that Reagan was going to run against him in the GOP primary, he tried to warn image-hungry voters that Reagan was going to "follow through on a well-planned, well-rehearsed theatrical presentation." It was clear that Christopher did not understand that real political experience no longer counts in elections. In fact, it has not counted for some time. If a candidate can project a Vistavision *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town,* he can make it. And Reagan did. And he figures to beat Governor Brown by at least a false eyelash.

Can't you see Inauguration Day, 1972?

"Here they come, ladies and gentlemen, the president and vice-president-elect of the United States, Mr. Ronald Reagan and the honorable George Murphy.

"They are dressed in look-alike green plaid suits and boater hats. They lift their cans in salute to the crowd. And as the band strikes up "California, Here I Come," they break into a buck-and-wing.

"President-elect Reagan is expected to announce his cabinet choices within the next few days. He has already said he would appoint old hoss-soldier John Wayne Secretary for Defense, and Doris Day as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. He has also said Steve Reeves will head up his physical fitness program, and Truman Capote will replace J. Edgar Hoover as head of the FBI.

"At his press conference yesterday he named Jimmy Fidler White House Press Secretary. And rumors abound that the names of several big Hollywood producers have been mentioned for Secretary of the Treasury.

"Oh, they're ready now. Walt Disney will read the oath of office . . ."

R.P.D.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE I'S HAVE IT

Who are *they?*

That's what I've started asking myself, and I find insights in reply. Paradoxically, more often than not *they* really ought to be me—or else whomever I chance to be talking with. Or sometimes both.

Mere confusion of pronouns? I think not. True, everyone shares all the pronomial roles (isn't there a poem by Stephen Spender which illumines the point?) and that is part of the matter. But confusion of responsibility also may compound any particular problem. There's where my question "Who are they?" comes in.

A neighbor insists: "They ought to have brighter street lights on our block!" The lights are dim, of course, and far between; but who are *they?* Is my neighbor proposing to lead the drive for new street lamps—lighting a candle, as it were, rather than complaining of darkness? Hardly ever. It may not even occur to him that he shares responsibility for our darkened street. Easier by far to slink behind *them,* and simply grump.

To take another example, who hasn't resorted to the old quip "What'll they think of next?" by way of comment on some welcome breakthrough? And who are *they?* Fact is, they're only fellow human beings. Perhaps you or I could have made this same invention, whatever it is, but we just plain didn't. And now maybe *we* should be the ones trying to think of something next!

As civilization's complexities multiply, each of us must beware increasingly of the easy abdication of responsibility to nameless others—of accepting all things as they come, without personal quest or question before the fact.

Frenchmen have a standard phrase for what faces the ne'er-do-much. *Fait accompli,* they call it—and there's a built-in shrug which punctuates the usage.

To fracture the French only slightly, I'm indomitably opposed to having my "fate" *accompli* by others. When one stops to ponder, *they* are only other I's. And why shouldn't I be the I to take initiatives in what concerns me?

JEFF CORYDON
Bethesda, Maryland

R.I.P. PUSSYCAT

The day is overcast and an intermittent mist dominates the proper background as the funeral party winds its way to the grave site. A modest group of people are gathered around the small hole in the earth. The clergyman gives a concise but heart-rending epitaph, and the body is laid to rest.

The tombstone is formidable and reads RIP Pussycat.

Another beloved pet has been buried by a confused and bereaved "master."

The interring of animals dates to the days of the pharaohs in Egypt. Cats were considered sacred and were laid to rest in beautiful tombs, some even were buried in the great pyramids, beside the deceased rulers.

In the Buddhist countries of the world animals receive special burial. The Buddhists believe the animals have souls and will go to Nirvana, a place of release from worldly pain and sorrow.

A part of the Buddhist ceremony is the placing of food on the grave with the expectation that the animal will return from the spirit world for a visit.

On the outskirts of Tokyo there are buried in the Buddhist manner 50,000 animals including dogs, cats, goats, monkeys and a horse. Each grave is simply marked with a simple wooden tag that is given to the deceased animal by a Buddhist monk to carry in the spirit world with his death name engraved into it.

The sacred cows of India when they die are cremated on the spot in a holy ceremony.

At Asnieres, a suburb of Paris, there is Le Cemetiere des Chiens. In this cemetery there are buried dogs, cats, monkeys, rabbits, parrots, a pigeon, a hen, a young lioness, and two horses. A wide assortment of inscriptions, some bordering on lunacy, are to be found on the luxurious tombstones (e.g. *I had only thee. You had only me.* Or *Go bye-bye sweetie-pie.*).

The prices are reasonable, about two dollars a month per plot, but then how much room does a pussycat need?

WIFE

Wife (American-style) is a joke word. It means a battle axe, a hen, a dull pain, The Boss.

Wife is a truant officer who deserves the hookey her husband plays on her with his secretary or the waitress at the snack shop. When she phones for her husband at his office, she hears "War Department" being relayed to his ears and she is at peace. She may consider it her due.

On TV, *wife* is one who manipulates and outwits her husband. In real life she is the hypochondriac who outlives him and then relaxes on his hard-earned life-savings at Miami Beach.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Physically, she may be chic, except for a small run in her nylons—30-ish; or plump with veined hands and pink-rimmed glasses—40-ish.

That was the picture I too carried in my mind and identified with until the plumber gave me another one when he came calling to give us an estimate.

He rings the back-door bell, a middle-aged stoop-shouldered man, walks diffidently in, and thrusts a box into my husband's hands.

"Present for you. Out-door thermometer." He makes it sound like a question.

"Say that's great," says my husband, "and thank you!"

They disappear into the basement for ten pipe-clanking minutes, and then reappear in the kitchen where I am basting my roast.

"By the way," the plumber is saying, "there's a new formica type of material for shower stalls, only darned if I can remember its name. My wife would know though, if I could call her."

I show him the phone, and he dials.

"June honey, how are you?" he says, and asks her his question.

The sweetness of her voice comes through to us over the wires. She seems to answer more than the question, and he laughs into the phone.

"Thank you, honey," he finally says and places the receiver back on the cradle, his hand lingering on its smooth surface.

As he returns to us, his eyes are bright and young. He is blushing, but his shoulders are thrust back.

"June, my wife," he says, and there is a sudden resonance, a virility in his voice. "Wonderful girl. Been working along with me in the office—on and off, that is, with four kids—these past twenty-five years. My right hand."

With sudden prideful, if hazed eyes, I look at my own right hand. Where half a second before the veins on it had been even more pronounced, probably from the oven heat, I now can hardly see them at all.

G. Wosk
Evanston, Ill.

CONDITIONS: 1963

Thank God for the CBC,
My heartfelt thanks.
This is no joke.
Thank God for Mozart and the Russian Army Chorus,
And thanks for enunciations and John Collingwood Reade.

Thanks for hockey
Plays by Duerrenmatt,
Quakers and Kapuskasing:
(They pay their teachers up there)
Thank God for the Jubilee Auditoriums,
For O'Keefe's beer,
And thanks for Walt Whitman,
Else I could not in good conscience compound
Lists like this.

Thank God for boredom, my helplessness,
My frustration, my lack of love,
My chest puffing: here I cry, you better laugh.

I cannot thank God for the years past,
I paid for them in living,
But I'll go on with thanks for Rawhide,
My brother-in-law, memories of a dead mother,
Canada, French-Canadian girls and Sturgeon Falls.
(I knew I could write myself out of sorrow.)

Thank God for the years to come.
Damn Germany for tossing Jewish babies in the fire.
Damn America for throwing the fire on Japanese babies.
Damn Russia for reminding us of our capabilities.

I did not begin to damn.
I'm terribly humble, but I'm human.
Thank God for Jesus Christ,
But most of all thanks for His expectations.

CONDITIONS: 1965

Last time I began in thanks;
I ended in damning.
Since then World War Two
Has become as remote as World War One.
Kennedy was shot. (Lilacs all around.)
Ruby shot the assassin.
T. V. shot the public.
Dallas shot the law.
Johnson has since shot Vietnam.
India shot Ghandi in Kashmir.
Negroes shot negroism in Watts.

Escape to a mental Walden is impossible:
(Fallout filters!)
Sartre cites sodomy as a basis for sainthood.
Socialism requires senility.
Love is the absence of hate.
Sense finds a haven in Albee's absurd.
Safety is found in insanity.

I have grown a little.
I was so national last time:
Now dissolution has at least become global.

I sing now the sun of a day,
The smile of my wife,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The question of a student,
Leaves, especially those of the geranium,
The blue of my ink,
The white of this paper:—

A touch of hysteria
Creeps into my laughter,
Perhaps, it's maturity come late.

J. McLeod
Minden, Ontario
Canada

LETTERS NEVER MAILED DEPARTMENT

Arkansaw, Wisconsin
June 14, 1966

Dr. J. K. Burns
University College
Galway, Ireland

Dear Doctor Burns:

You recently said, "Use of the reproductive act, apart from its intended purpose of procreation, can be expected on a biological and medicinal basis to cause an increase in the incidence of congenital stress, infective and malignant disease."

This note is to warn you: if you enter the United States, you may be liable to prosecution under a recent law passed to protect the housewife.

Although it has not yet been tested in court, I feel positive that the "truth in packaging" statute will apply to ideas as well as to pumpernickel.

Awestrickenly yours,

Diogones Jones

from EXCELLENCY:

The thumbscrews are losing their bite.
The people are
Forewarned and, being forewarned,
They do not set much store by the thumbscrews.

I recommend a new set of thumbscrews
And much publicity attendant upon their purchase
And much less time for the people in transit

To reconcile themselves to what is in store.
Just random thoughts of an outpost commander
Trying to help, and I remain, Yours truly.

from EXCELLENCY:

The music we play when they enter is exactly
The music we were told to play and yet
The music does not seem to please the people
Despite what the instructions said would happen.

I cannot believe the instructions were wrong.
I believe
There is something about these obstinate people
Which makes them impervious to music
And what I say is let the music stop.

After all, the music is not essential
Except that it must be played. So I propose
To let the people enter and I shall count them
Except that while I count them I shall hum it.

from EXCELLENCY:

It is a question whether to make our objectives
Known to the people or keep the people guessing.

Our objectives are stunning of course but so is
silence.
Silence can serve to keep the people off balance

By dissipating their hopes in every direction.
Candor on the other hand can stun them

So that they do not stir while we work our will.
Withal, our objectives seem so incredible

That no one believes our objectives when we state

And so I have raised a pointless question. Sorry.

John Pauker

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Nun Who Came In From The Cold

Francis Murray

". . . we bring you *Speak into the Mike,* with New York's favorite radio personality, Fanny Hill."

"Good morning. I'm deliriously happy to bring to the microphone today that glamorous star of stage, screen, radio, TV and night clubs who has just been elected to the United States Senate from California, Dolly Bois d'Arc. Welcome to the show, Dolly."

"Thank you, darling."

"Now, Dolly, before we waste another single moment, I want you to tell our listeners all the wonderful, wonderful things that you have been doing since you were on my show last. Weren't you in a convent recently?"

"Yes, darling, I was. For six months."

"Tell me, why on earth would a successful star like yourself give up everything to go into a convent?"

"Well, frankly, darling, I needed the rest. You see, I'd made 13 Hollywood musicals in a row—all shot on location—and I was simply exhausted. I even fainted on the set in Tahiti while making *Go, Go Gauguin.*"

"Yes, I read about that in the *Times.* Do you play one of Gauguin's mistresses in the picture?"

"Oh, no, darling, this isn't about Gauguin the painter. It's a musical adaptation of *Moby Dick* and it's a surfing picture. However, I did do the life of Gauguin back in 1954. *Wet Blanket.* Remember?"

"I believe you played a teen-age nymphomaniac who hid his paint brushes in your bra. Didn't you receive an Academy Award nomination for that role?"

"No, darling, not for *Wet Blanket,* although it did receive 38 Oscar nominations, including 'Best Original Title for a Screenplay,' 'Best Typewritten Screenplay,' and 'Best Performance by a Script Girl.' "

"Then for which picture did you get a nomination?"

"For *Flotsam.* It was a dramatic version of Gauguin's life. I jumped into a volcano with my favorite goat at the end of the picture. Remember? It was all terribly, terribly sad."

"Oh, yes, that was the night you were on stage to accept an Oscar for 'Best Actress' and someone discovered that the envelope with your name on it was just a bill from that rent-a-car outfit that got mixed in by mistake."

"Yes, my drama coach said I gave even a better performance when I fainted."

"Tell me, Dolly, aren't musicals extremely tiring, what with all the singing and dancing you have to do?"

"Not the singing and dancing, darling. I don't have to do either. But it's terribly, terribly exhausing waiting around while my understudies go through those endless dance numbers, what with the re-takes and all. I have to stand by in make-up and costume in case they need any close-ups."

"It must be simply dreadful. But getting back to the convent, Dolly, why did you choose that particular order?"

"Oh, George—he's my business manager—did it for me. He found this darling little place in New Mexico with its own swimming pool and a cute little vineyard out back. They even make their own wine. For cooking purposes, of course. It's really quite marvelous. They have television, ping-pong, *TV Guide* and all the necessities. Of course, it's cloistered."

"Yes, I thought that it was. Just what did you do? I know my listeners are just dying to know."

"Well, for one thing, darling, I taught the nuns how to do the Watusi. You can never tell when Rosalind Russell or Debbie Reynolds might want to audition them for a movie. I also organized a drama workshop."

"How terribly fascinating. What kind of plays did you do?"

"Oh, *Mr. Roberts, Hamlet, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and that sort of thing. We had a summer session out-of-doors but the nights got so cold that we had to move inside. It was a real challenge for me. Of course, all the male parts had to be written out of the script."

"Naturally."

"We had a TV workshop, writing classes and in one of my music classes one of the nuns composed a rock-'n-roll song that has been in the Top Ten for 47 weeks. It's called *I've Hocked My Guitar, Now That You've Left Me.* Our barbershop quartet recorded it in Albuquerque and it's been a smash ever since."

"Then why did you decide to go into politics, Dolly?"

"It was George's idea, darling. He thought it would be good publicity for me. Right after I went into the convent, my fan mail slowed considerably and I was on the cover of only 12 fan magazines the following month. Of course, there was a big splash when I went in. You remember how I announced my decision on *The Ed Sullivan Show* one Sunday. It was terribly, terribly exciting and I was swamped with offers."

"So you decided to run for the Senate after you came out?"

"No, darling, George got the idea while I was still in the convent. He trained a crow to fly over the walls and bring me messages tied to its little legs. Then I would smuggle out my answers with the Fuller Brush man. Well, by the time I came out it was almost election time."

"Wasn't the campaigning terribly hard on you?"

"Not really, darling. George had everything worked out so beautifully that I didn't have to make a single speech. He put up signs all along the freeways and that's all we did. That's the beauty about being a star. Everybody knows you. There was just one TV appearance that I couldn't get out of and it came off beautifully.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My stand-in did the talking and I just moved my lips."

"Do you like being in Congress, Dolly?"

"Oh, yes, I adore it. I've always loved Washington, the cherry trees and all. And you should see my office. I had it completely redone in apricot and Shirley Temple green."

"I can't wait to see it. Especially after all those gorgeous color pictures in *McCall's*. Do you attend the sessions regularly?"

"Oh, yes, I have one of the best attendance records in the Senate. Of course, being a junior senator I have to set a good example. I was there three weeks ago for the official photograph. George thought that would be good for me. And only last Wednesday he got me out of bed to rush over to the capitol because some *Life* photographers were there. And guess what?"

"What?"

"I'm going to be on the cover."

"How perfectly marvelous."

"Yes, I'm terribly, terribly excited about it. I haven't been on the cover of *Life* since I launched the tugboat in New York."

SPRING FEVER

The heat makes a shambles
Of how we were alert,

The hard frost, that braced us
Against sleep, and the night,

Iced full of stars, gone.
No wonder what gets done

Has to be kept in line
By makeshift and hard practice.

Stephen Tudor

"Will you introduce any bills?"

"Oh, yes, darling. George is working on that now. For one thing, I will support a bill to rename California 'Disneyland.' Isn't that a cute idea? Also, I plan to introduce a bill to make California Granite the National Rock. I would like to see us move the war in Viet Nam somewhere else and give those people a rest. And I am going to get the White House painted Shirley Temple Green."

"I can see that you are going to be a very active congressman, Dolly. What other plans do you have? Careerwise, I mean?"

"George hopes to get a TV series for me. We'll call it *Mrs. Chips Goes to Washington*. Isn't that a darling idea? I'm terribly, terribly excited about it. Then my studio wants me to do all the parts in a remake of *The Women*. But who can we find to write the script? That's something that you wouldn't entrust to just anybody and I understand Truman Capote is now out of the country, visiting all the jails in Mexico."

"And didn't I hear through the grapevine that you may do a Broadway play?"

"Yes, darling, that is correct. I've been offered the lead in one of the hit musicals. I would be replacing Polyethylene Tyler, who's been such a smash. But there is one slight complication. She broke her leg just before opening night and she's been playing in a plaster cast since. Well, you know how management insists that the replacement for a star should be a carbon copy of the original, so I'll have to break my right leg before I can assume the part. George is now trying to find a simple, painless way to do it. If it were in the winter I could just go to a ski resort. But how do you break a leg in the summer?"

"Exactly."

"I'm scheduled to appear on *Batman*. I play a teenager who blows up school buildings with atomic spitballs. And speaking of Batman, Mr. Bing has invited me to look at the score of a new opera that Virgil Thomson is writing for the Metropolitan Opera Co. It's called *Batman and Robin*."

"That sounds real kookie. Will you live in Washington most of the time, Dolly?"

"Yes, for the time being. I'll *have* to report for roll calls from time to time. And I may decide to put Debra Jane in school there."

"Debra Jane? Who is that, darling?"

"Oh, she's my little girl by my fifth husband. I recently got her in a child custody suit, and it all came as such a surprise that I just don't know what to do with the little dear."

"Do you have any other children?"

"Yes, four more. One by each of my husbands."

"What are their names?"

"Well, my first husband was . . ."

"No, I mean the children."

"Oh, Debra Jane and John."

"That's only two."

"I know, but you see my little girls are both named Debra Jane and the boys are all called John. It seems so much simpler that way. They're rarely all together at the same time and you'd be surprised how much I save on monograms alone."

"I can imagine. Where are the other children?"

"Well, George . . ."

"Your business manager?"

"That's right, darling, but he's also my second husband. He keeps the oldest Debra Jane. Then John by my fourth husband lives with his grandmother in Texas . . . John by my third husband is in military school in New Hampshire . . . and John by my first husband . . . my goodness, do you know I haven't the vaguest idea where that child is. Of course, I haven't seen him in 14 years. We used to exchange Christmas cards every year but we don't even do that any more. He might be . . ."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Portable D. L. Marston

Leonard Conversi

When I was asked for an Introduction to the *Portable* Marston, I knew almost at once what would prove to be the principal difficulty of my subject. What insisted on acknowledgment was something more than his plays, novels, poems, essays, travel sketches, notebooks, diaries, or love letters (" Did I leave my watch at your place last night? I didn't have it when I got off the bus. Please let me know as I need it.") I knew that what I would have to deal with was not only Marston's position in the history of modernism but his importance, as writer and ideologist, to my literary generation.

For convenience's sake, that generation may be thought of as the one that includes Sefta Farr, Loie Fugascz, Harry Remorso, and Joan Crawford. What a bunch. We had some grand times, though. We used to go to the old New Haven Bijou every Saturday afternoon for the stage show. I'll never forget the time a magician asked for a volunteer and Loie Fugascz went up and every time he pulled a handkerchief out of her ear she made her eyes cross. We were hysterical. She was a riot with her big fat legs.

The catalyst that produced our movement was Marston's accident and the "obscure hurt," as he called it, which he suffered. We first read of it in one of the morning papers: "Mishap In Home. Obscure Hurt Cited. Some Progress Seen." The story was accompanied by the now famous photograph of Marston being carried to an ambulance, his hands clasped above his head in the boxer's salute while crowds of neighbors line the street cheering and signing fraudulent accident reports.

Sefta Farr was the first to understand the importance of the news. "This is it," Sefta said. "Let's move out." There was laughter and jostling, some of it very Czarist in character, as old friends cheered each other on. Sefta smiled, not looking at anybody, her eyes proud and shy with the way we were taking it. Harry Remorso grabbed her around the waist, and they began a tremendous necking session on the couch as our voices rose in chorus. We saw them and beckoned to each other, winking and smiling conspiratorially. We gathered around the couch and switched to thorough-bass as Loie Fugascz threw herself into one of her wild calypso improvisations:

> Little girl she sit on couch,
> Boy come, make love to her,
> Ho, ho, Princess Mar-gar-et.

She was a riot, that girl, but Harry took umbrage, broke off the necking, and made for her throat. "Leave her alone!" screamed Sefta, trying, and failing, to rise from the couch. She was magnificent then, eyes flashing, breasts heaving beneath the bandoleers, left leg struggling for leverage.

I wonder, can I show you Sefta as she was, show her so as to make clear to you how much she meant to us, and why? Not as she sat sobbing uncontrollably, having been dismissed by Escudeo for her habit of letting go of her castanets in the middle of a spot turn, which had resulted in the hospitalization of several members of the company. Not, even, as she was during the years when those of her friends who knew her realized that secretly she was afraid of stardom.

Meanwhile, Sefta had found her leverage, Harry had despoiled Loie of her finest gear, and we had lost out momentum. When we looked out of the window and saw the streets jammed with the carts of refugees, we decided to stay put. At nightfall, Loie made her way to the drugstore and returned with a get-well card. We wrote, on the back of it, the manifesto of our movement and sent the card to Marston at the hospital:

> Dear Master,
>
> We write this from our apartment, having, only a moment ago, dismissed the last of the porters. After a time of aimless travel, the mere immense bustling bother of which, summed, as out of poor, dear, tired, old Necessity it must be, in the sequence of timetables consulted—their air of positively not turning bored backs on old banalities still beautifully kept up, as who should say, "Oh, yes, *we* are tired, *we* are shabby, *we* are (why deny it?) overworn, but only unfold and believe us, only take us up and at our word, only see (all asterisks remarked as to baggage "handled," passengers "discharged," and the 125th Street acknowledged or foregone) if, in the flat, cold

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

early morning light of poor, dear, old Stamford, the engine is *not* stopped, the stairwell *not* disengaged, the conductor—some blatant "Hughie" or "Dave," all key-chains and clairvoyance—*not* wrung of his tautological yell, and your leaving and arriving (how we call it up and see it! How, by the fine, brave flap of the flag of our assurance, it takes all the foreground of our vision! But isn't it, the fineness and the bravery, precisely what is supposed to have saved us? Isn't it what, more than anything else, we are supposed to be "good" at?) *not* "on time"—tickets demanded and "punched," orange drink purchased and sipped (orange drink drunk to the straw's shrieked expiration figuring, in the great, hushed New York, New Haven, and Hartford salience, as consummation too distractingly gross), wearies one even as memory, and conjures from the restless analyst a thought for the return to carpet, pen, and lamp, snug in the finalities of the acheived address.

But how and from what point of view—having arrived at the slippered state—to (quite simply) write, how most incontrovertibily summon the demon of the refined and refining perception by whom the hidden may be revealed, two and two put together, and the beans disgustingly spilt? How else—the wide, level air of the American Spirit of Place void of all other aids to texture and reference—than by the colloquizing ways of the human voice itself:

"I see."

"What?"

"Oh, everything, all of it—just what, by the swept arm of your own handsome view of it, there is *to* see."

"*My* view?"

"*Our* view."

"I see."

"*We* see."

"You said it."

Thus may we be delivered by pity and terror from the welter of the absence of the felt limit to sensibility, in the spectacle, Master, of your fabulizing form. We adjust and focus them, the doubly purgative pair, as, in a shushing ambience of programs rolled and the horrid usherette withdrawn, you settle back into the pillow of the recuperative bed to receive and chorus the company of the future quotidian, the ghosts of the unborn, that great, rustling troupe of players striding costumed towards the moment—proscenium, curtain, and lights—of the acting-out of their unmemorized, unrehearsed, and unpromptedly letter-perfect repertoire.

We remain, *etc.*

And we all signed it.

Marston then began the composition and publication of his plays, novels, poems, esays, travel sketches, notebooks, diaries, and love letters ("I am returning the watch you sent me as it is not my watch. My watch is the one with the phosphorescent dial and the five-year warranty. Please send it to me as soon as possible as I find it very inconvenient being without it.") all so eagerly awaited by his public, cooped up as we were, and all characterized by his liberating vision.

Taking, for example, the novel *Presume No Carnage* and opening almost at random, we find:

> I lay prone. Hands were lifting me up—I I could tell by the way my emerald shifted. Thank God no one had despoiled me of it! How had I come here? I did not know. Yes, wait, I remembered! We had stopped for a drink while making the big push. The Lieutenant was upstairs with the girl, the Sergeant was downstairs with the other girl, and I was on the rez-de chaussée, or first floor, writing letters home in an attempt to channel my resentment. Sfortunato, sfortunato! Vendetta! No! No! (He falls to the ground, senseless.) It's remarkable how much of the language you can pick up if you avoid the touristy places. Suddenly, they hit us with everything they had. The next thing I knew, I was lying in a hospital bed receiving reassurances as to my family's future from Hal Parker.

This theme is resumed and developed in the play, *A Consuming Fire*. Opening, this time quite frankly calculatingly, to Act I, Scene i, we find:

> *D. L.* I lie prone. A large roll-top desk covered with manuscripts is situated downstage center. Persons out of my past, dressed in the appropriate period costume, walk to upstage center, address words to me, then exeunt.
>
> *Eva Coustaud.* I am Eva Coustaud. You knew me in Paris in the days of the war. I had a child. It was not your child. I just wanted to let you know in case it was worrying you.
>
> *Regnava Curtis.* I am Regnava Curtis, the first woman to help make you what you are. I'll never forget how you came to me that day and stood outside my door, your cap in one hand and milk carrier in the other, asking if I wanted any heavy cream for the weekend. That was the beginning. Your transformation was slow, but I was persistent. It was I who taught you how to enter a room, sit a horse, and whistle with two fingers for a cab. I had particular trouble getting you to stop ordering potatoes as "a side of French for the lady." But I loved you because, in spite of being untutored and gauche, you were cunning, deciteful, and mean. A real thug, in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other words. I knew I could never hold you, and I was proved right. With the approach of spring and the healing of your hurt (a lot of fuss about nothing, if you ask me), you were gone. I found your note in one of the empties. It read: "Dear Reenie, I have met another girl. She is a fine girl. I have found a job in a town near here. This girls works too and we are looking for a house. Please do not make trouble for us. She is a fine girl and I appreciate what you tried to do for me. You nagged me too much. D. L."

That speech is probably the high point in the arc of the Marstonian demonism. There remained only the mellowing and refinement to be found in the final period, that willingness to accept the past on its own terms that is the sign of the twilight of a master. It receives its most incisive expression in the epistle dedicatory of his penultimate volume of verse, *The Mail from Tunis:*

I shall lie prone
With O'Connell, Parnell,
Horseback-riders, property owners,
All the renown that fell.
Swing your girl with a do-si-do.
I call to the eye of the mind
Great houses, women, the money
that people owe me—
You most of all, Michael O'Duggan,
Because you borrowed the most.
You all know the do-si-do.
I live in scorn of my hurt,
I summon for guide Lady Clew and
her house—
For twelve long, scornful years
They never paid the water bill.
You needn't sham; you know
I am.

After this, the Master had merely to repeat old themes and set his literary house in order. His last years were spent, in fact, in a glow of self-satisfaction. In the letter that is the last in the monumental volume, *Letters, with Addenda: Anonymous Abuse,* and that serves as a kind of informal summing-up of his life as man and artist, he wrote:

If I do not receive my watch by return post, I shall have to put the matter into the hands of my solicitors. The watch you sent me, with the inscription on the back reading, "To Eric—How Can I Spell A Sigh?", is not mine. My watch is the one with the phosphorescent dial and the five-year warrant. Please return it AT ONCE!

Annoyedly,

D. L.

Paris-New York-Santa Monica

The Thief

Joyce Carol Oates

David Lawlor, thirty-two, in love, returned from his office at the university one afternoon to find that his apartment had been broken into. He stood just inside the door, his key in his hand, staring with a queer melodramatic smile at the room before him. Clothes lay scattered about, clothes he hardly remembered owning; one of the drawers from the bedroom bureau had been brought out and thrown down as if in rage. A trail of clothing led through to the bedroom. David went in slowly, as if he himself were the intruder. The bedroom was cluttered savagely: clothes thrown into corners, the bed sheets pulled out, his pillow tossed on the floor torn halfway out of its pillowcase. David tried to recognize the room but could not. Though he stood in the doorway for a while, his heart pounding, he was unable to recognize or to claim the violated life arrayed here before him: socks, underwear, shirts, shoes, trousers, papers, by the window a discarded packet of snapshots he had had developed only the day before. A framed print of a Utrillo street scene had been snatched off the wall and now lay halfway under the bed—presumably the thief had been looking for a wall safe.

After a while a sense of mute, chilling peace overtook him, the peace of utter helplessness that is so comforting. His smile did not lessen, neither did he make any sudden gestures, though he thought of reaching for a cigarette. There was something about the sanctity of the thief's work that hypnotized him: the thief himself might have been standing before him, meek and sly and triumphant, an anonymous shabby man David would never meet. It was true he did meet extraordinary people on buses sometimes, or begging for money on the street, or waiting forlornly outside the cheap taverns that braceleted the university; but the thief would not be an extraordinary person. He would be a man of average height, like David himself, not ugly, not handsome, again like David, and he would have the same slight apologetic squint that David had struggled against all his life—the cringing guilty look of the orphaned in a world of sons and fathers and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grandfathers. Of course he had overcome that squint, he knew, he was now well into his career, a successful young teacher whose life had become richly complex as the lives of orphans never become. Yet in moments of panic he would forget these accomplishments. The first really bitter argument he had had with Carol had brought back to his face the old mask with that hard defensive smile, the eyes narrowed as if fearful of daylight . . . . At the thought of Carol he felt suddenly guilty, as if he were hiding something from her. He reached for a cigarette and went to the bed, sat down, and dialed her number.

The phone rang. Waking slowly from his daze, David listened to the ringing at the other end as he always did, breathing foolishly. He was thirty-two and had thought of himself as an adult for twenty years. He had had no childhood, did not regret it; he was proud of the bitterness of his early years, the orphanage, the foster homes, the charity (Rotarians) that had awarded him a cheap scholarship to the state university, a scholarship already turned down by other students. He was proud of having learned hardness at an age when other children groped through dream worlds bounded by expensive chain fences at the backs of tended yards and the sleek luxurious lengths of automobiles parked temporarily at curbs in front of homes. Yet he waited anxiously for her to answer, and even the ghostly thief and the violence he had prepared for David dissolved in the face of this risk. For if she did not answer he would not know what to do.

She picked up the telephone. "Hello," she said suspiciously. Months ago, when he had first met her, he had called her once upon impulse but had not identified himself and had stood listening eagerly to her petulant helloes, until she had slammed the receiver down. He had never told her about that, knowing she would not have understood. "Hello, Carol," he said, "this is David." "Yes," she said. Her voice had hardly changed. "Is something wrong? Why are you calling now?" "Is Larry home?" he said. "No, it isn't four yet, you should know his schedule by now—" Her words trailed off into an accusation that linked her to him in an intimacy as domestic as marriage itself, since it assumed his knowledge of the habits and maneuverings of her own marriage. "I don't want to upset you, Carol," he said, "but something's happened over here. My apartment has been burglarized." He waited; he could hear her breathing. "Someone broke in and threw everything around." Someone what?" she said. "David? You mean a burglar?" "Yes, a burglar—I just came in now, five minutes ago, and the door had been forced open, the bedroom here is a mess—" His own voice had begun to excite him. In another minute he would begin to stammer. "But David, did he get anything? Any money?" He took the unlighted cigarette out of his mouth as if he had just recalled it. He had not thought about that. "David?" she said. "Are you all right?" "Yes, of course, I just—I didn't have time—" Before his students he was competent and sarcastic; their idle young faces tensed before his wit. But before Carol, before even her husband (drab older man, in suits that needed presing as David's never did!), he felt the old temptation to stammer, to allow his words to fragmentize into humbler gasps of sounds that would affront no one. "I guess I just wanted to talk to you, Carol," he said, closing his eyes, "I guess I was a little frightened—I thought he might still be in here, when I first came in—" "That's right, that's right," she said, sharply, "what if he had a gun! You didn't see anyone? What a chance you took!" He sat there and found that he was staring at the ashtray on the night table, at the mingled ashes and stubs of cigarettes, the lipstick-marred cigarettes she had left there the day before. At the sight of them he became angry and ashamed, for he realized that the thief had seen them too, had perhaps guessed everything. "David? David? Is something wrong?" Carol said. "No, nothing," he said. They fell silent. With so much to say they had nothing to say. After a while she went on, flatly, "David, I want you to call the police. Don't tell me you don't want to bother. Please. Don't disturb anything and call them. Will you do that? David?" Now the full bright glare of her attention had swung upon him and he felt warmed by it, like a child; he was consoled. If the thief had violated him, Carol now restored him to himself, to the uncertain Platonic image he had contrived that was at last worthy of the love he had pleaded for during those years it had been constantly denied him, when it was unthinkable in his meager life, and which he sensed now to be available on all sides about him—nervous shy girls to whom he was introduced by married friends, colleagues at the university who were intellectual and sleekly-groomed as conspicuous pedigreed animals, women whose gazes he blundered into accidentally in drugstores and supermarkets, recognizable himself as a bachelor not quite adequately tended. Yes, the promise of life was now all about him, but its very availability seemed to chill him and push him further into this infatuation with a girl several years younger than himself, a not beautiful girl, an oversensitive and selfish girl who had never made him happy and had never tried. "Are you listening?" she said. "David, what's wrong? I don't like you this way. Will you come over tonight? Yes, you should, if you were robbed you should come over to tell us about it. After dinner, all right? David? Are you coming? You can tell us about it then." "Yes, yes," he said wearily, already defeated by her "us," that comfortably shabby banality he would never be able to overcome. "Goodbye, honey." "Yes, now take care of yourself, I love you," she said. He hung up and lit his cigarette.

The room now seemed to him slightly comic. There was no dignity in his scattered underclothes; even the laundry bag had been dragged out of the closet and its contents half emptied out. Dirty socks, a filthy towel. He got up, moved slowly to stuff them back inside; no one was going to see that. Then he went through to his study, where he kept a little money, mostly tens and twenties, stuck in books. Very little had been disturbed in the study, a narrow room with a desk, a chair, two lamps, and walls of books. Some papers on the desk had been brushed onto the floor and the desk drawers

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had been pulled out, but the books on the shelves had not been touched. David took one of the books out and checked the money inside: two twenty dollar bills. He checked another book; nothing stolen. Evidently the thief had found nothing. Yet David felt a strange embarrassment and pity for him, for his wasted activity, as if it were somehow he who had failed so greatly. David looked about at the neat shelves of books, and wondered why, in his disappointment, the thief had not destroyed anything. He could have torn pages out of books, wantonly, as David supposed he might have done in the thief's place—though it was absurd to think of himself in the thief's place, for he had never stolen anything in his life.

He called the police. Waiting for them, he was proud of his placidity; perhaps the police would be surprised. He felt even a little festive. But as the minutes passed and the police did not come, he began to get angry, feeling himself snubbed, the burglary itself snubbed, something inconsequential. He wanted to call Carol again, or one of his friends. He needed to joke about what had happened. Nervously he lit cigarettes and let them burn out. He emptied the ash tray into a wastebasket and hid Carol's cigarettes beneath a crumpled tissue. Now, looking at the cigarettes, he had the idea that perhaps the intruder had not been an ordinary thief, after all, but someone who had broken into David's apartment by choice. At once he thought of Carol's husband, but rejected this thought as absurd. He had begun to get a headache and wandered aimlessly through the apartment. When he returned to the bedroom the scattered clothing and sheets had begun to take on a familiar look, the disorder obliquely significant as wounds of which one might be proud. Who had done this? When had it happened? If only he had come home earlier, had been able at least to glance at the thief's face! He thought to pick up the packet of snapshots off the floor and, though he heard footsteps on the stairs, he looked inside: snapshots of himself and friends of his, another married couple, snapshots of Carol. But something was missing. He looked through them again. He counted them. There had been twelve snapshots, but now there were only ten. Only one picture of Carol remained, the one of her sitting on the bench before the Science Building, smiling glibly and impersonally into the sunshine. The police were coming down the hall and he went to open the door for them, fumbling through the snapshots. He had taken two other pictures of Carol that same morning, one of her standing on the steps of the art museum, looking indifferently past him, the other taken as she stared petulantly at him with her arms crossed, annoyed at something, some temporary thing. Or was he mistaken? His brain seemed to reel.

He let the police in. Two men in uniform, one detective in street clothes. While he stood back and watched the police walked about perfunctorily, not looking at him. David was anxious to assure them that nothing had been stolen, until finally the detective wrote this information down. "You're sure nothing's gone, right," the man said. He was as young as David; David had expected someone older and felt oddly disappointed. "You looked real carefully, right? No money or valuables or anything?" "I don't have any valuables," David said defensively. The policemen, returning from the bedroom, also asked him if anything had been taken. "No, nothing," he said. They were silent for a moment in the face of his rather frightened abruptness; then they prepared to leave. "I don't own anything valuable," he said apologetically.

That night he woke several times from troubled dreams. His head still ached; he felt terror suddenly that someone was in the apartment with him. He lay still, his heart pounded with the effort of his listening. About him in the uncertain dark the bedroom did not look familiar. Though he had picked everything up, put everything away, the ghostly presence of the thief remained. He lay rigid for five minutes, listening. He heard nothing. Then he snapped on the light and peered into the corners, some dim shameful memory stirred by this terror of a lost night in his childhood when he had lain awake for hours listening for footsteps that never came. That had been one of the first in a series of foster homes, in a farmhouse with an old woman and her daughter, hard silent workers, whose faces he could never remember from one day to the next. His room had been at the back of the house. An outside, open stairway had led past it and he imagined someone was climbing it, slowly and calculatingly, a step an hour, all the time in the world, no hurry, sooner or later he would have David in spite of David's knowledge of his presence . . . He got up, as if inspired. Something led him to his study. He snapped on the light and his attention was forced at once to the top of his desk, where his typewriter had been. Of course it was gone; it had been stolen. He had not seen that it was gone until now. Yet he felt nothing, his fear had subsided, he felt no anger, even, but was instead calmed as if something about the mere blank area there on the desk were reassuring him, restoring to him the heavy inertia of peace, peacefulness, that had overcome him earlier.

II

"Look, please, I'm sorry," Carol said, "I didn't mean to hurt you. Why does everything I say hurt you?"

"For God's sake—"

"Well, you act like it does. You pretend."

"I don't pretend anything," said David.

"Anyway you don't talk about the burglary too much. I didn't mean that, I'm sorry I said it."

"Oh, hell. I suppose I do."

"No, really. And now, now that it's happened to you once it may never happen again."

"Sure."

"What time is it?"

He reached around for his wristwatch and showed it to her, not looking at it himself. "Thank you," she said. She was a slender, hard woman, something about

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her expression and the ready defensive competence of her arms and legs made David think of her as hard. When she looked at him he was perplexed by the contemptuous warm intimacy her gaze suggested, as if this gaze fell upon anyone who happened to come this close to her. Her eyes were lashed thickly, the sockets indented as if parts of her face had grown more rapidly than others. She spoke of having had freckles once, but now they had faded; her skin was smooth with the brittle impersonal smoothness of statues. When the lighting was dim, as it was now, her face looked pale; in sunshine it took on a strange wan athletic look, a golden tint. She was the kind of girl David remembered from high school as spoiled and beautifully dressed, with expensive sweaters, carrying tennis rackets, laughing in a shrill self-conscious and yet totally indifferent language with others like herself. He remembered that he had always hated that kind of girl, and what he had hated had not been her pale selfish looks or her splendid confidence in herself, but rather her indifference. It was that indifference he could never penetrate. Now, annoyed perhaps by the way she put her arm behind her head, a casual gesture he thought a little forced, he felt the numbing growth of that old hatred stirred in him. Why did she not care that her lips were rimmed with flaking pink lipstick, that tiny wisps of hair curled damply onto her forehead in a way David could not suppose attractive?

"Don't look at me," she said. "It makes me nervous." She paused; David half expected her to ask what time it was, but she said nothing. She sighed. She drew the back of her hand gently across her forehead. After a moment she looked at him again. "I don't know what's wrong with me, I just feel funny. That man was in here just yesterday—"

"Yes, it's always something."

"Now I resent that," she said. She spoke slowly and precariously. "I really resent that. That's ridiculous."

"Your problem is that you want things but then you forget about them. Then they annoy you."

"So? What does that mean?" Her innocence was contemptuous and insulting; she seemed about to smile angrily at him. "I can't help it if you act so strangely. Has it got something to do with that burglary?"

"No."

"Did he take something after all? David?"

"I said no."

"I mean, you didn't have any personal things around —any—"

"No. Nothing."

"Then why do you act as if it's so important?"

"I'm not. That's something you're imagining."

"Look, please, with you it's always something. I meet you and have to guess what's wrong now, if I'm late or if you saw me talking to someone you don't approve of. It makes me tired."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that."

"You don't give a damn. You don't respect me."

"Don't start that again."

"Well, it's true, obviously it's true." And she glanced at him with a mild, amused look, to show him that she she did not care at all about his respect. "You weren't like this at first.' '

"You weren't like this at at first either."

"You didn't know me then. I've always been the same," she said bitterly. "Even now, with you, I'm still the same; that's what makes me tired. No, I don't mean that. I don't know what I mean. One of the reasons I liked you—"

"Liked me?"

"I liked you because you were so happy."

"Oh, hell."

"I did. You were always happy. You liked your students, you liked teaching, you liked the university."

"I still do. I like everything."

"I came to you because you were happy, but now you're not happy and it's my fault, obviously."

"My God, how egotistical!"

She sucked at her lip. She could not think of anything to say, he could see words suggest themselves to her and fall back again, rejected. For a moment, dizzily, he supposed she was thinking of leaving—she had done that once. In a rage he had never expected in himself David had walked through the rooms of the apartment, alone, digging at his hands with his nails, waiting for her to come back. She had not come back. That night he had stood across the street from her house, looking at the lighted windows, and he told himself that this pain would be revenged upon her, that he would force her, somehow, to humiliate herself before him, though he had known at the time that this would never come about. She was stronger than he. He could not overcome her, there was nothing he could do. She was the center of both their lives, and always their intimacy seemed arranged only so that they might talk about her, her problems, her aimless hopeless hopes, Carol inviting him to scorn her famished inner life so that she might reach out to include him in the inexplicable overwhelming hatred she seemed to feel for everything. But David had always resisted that; he was too clever. She wanted to continue her education, she said: she had already a master's degree in French, but wanted now a master's degree in physchology, since psychology would help her understand herself and she would be able to "do" something with it, help other people, whereas French, or English, would help no one; that was why she could not entirely respect David, she admitted, for his career in Renaissance literature which was wasteful and self-indulgent, and why she could not entirely respect her husband, a specialist in medieval history. When she spoke of these things David humored her as he humored his students, letting them talk on, not misleading them yet never pointing out to them the gross foolish errors they were making in their assessments of themselves. Carol's career was nothing to him; perhaps he resented it. Anyway it did not exist. She had begun several careers and ended them all abruptly, preferring to retreat rather than fail, and he could not take her seriously when she spoke of helping other people, for he knew how she despised other

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people: families on the street, teenagers dawdling home from school, old men sitting forlornly on park benches waiting for their lives to end.

"We discovered a new restaurant," Carol said suddenly.

David did not respond.

"Honey, we can go there sometime too. It has a palm tree in the foyer."

"That's nice."

"Not a real one, of course. The food is all right." She paused. "I didn't particularly like it, but it was something to do."

"Are you that bored?"

She shrugged her shoulders indifferently. "I get tired of reading. There's nothing else for me to do but read."

"You could try teaching again."

"I hated that. You know I hated that." She stared at him angrily. "Do you want me to go through that again? God! But I'm so tired of reading—"

"What are you reading now?"

"Oh, I don't know. *The Magic Mountain.*"

"Are you still reading that?"

"What do you mean, still? How long have I had it? Do you want it back? Anyway it's a stupid novel.

"It is not."

"It's pompous and stupid," she said. "I don't like it. Anyway you didn't read it either; I found some pages stuck together."

"What?"

"I found some pages uncut, stuck together at the top."

"That's not true."

WHEN THE EMPTINESS

When the emptiness lifts itself
off the old stool in the corner
and comes toward me,

I get up and leave,
but it manages to squeeze through
the closing door and follow me

down the block to the car.
Halfway there I start crying
and say to it look

I'm just realizing how little
my parents love each other.
But it doesn't listen.

It throws all the books
into the backseat with the underwear
and gets in beside me.

And when I get to Stokes's place
and cry very hard on the floor
that Terry lends me,

I feel a hand on my shoulder
and I say please
I'm just now leaving my wife

who says she loves me.
But I haven't enough love to believe her.
I haven't got anything for you.

We get back into the car
and when we get to Bob Grenier's
who lends me a bed to sleep in,

it comes up the stairs
and into the room,
sits down as if it belongs.

A MAN WHOSE WIFE LOVED HIM

A man whose wife loved him
sits in the park where they walked
eating raw liver
out of yesterday's newspaper.

It belongs to her.
She always had so much to give
even if the weather reports
did not come true.

He holds it in his hand.
He waves it at the trees
that stumble by after the squirrels.
He wishes they could have known.

A prettyt girl walks past the bench
with steel traps in her eyes.
Her mouth spits flakes of rust
on the macadam.

I wish you could have known he says.
It's the prize the brass ring
swinging in the air
on the screams of children.

The obituary says nothing about it.
The black and polished stone
sinking in the grass
says nothing at all about it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I said I found them. Do you think I'm lying?"

"Look, you're mixing that book up with something else—"

"Please, I know what I'm saying. I'm in control of myself. I found some pages uncut."

David stared at her. Beneath her nervous flesh he could see the vague stubborn outline of her skull. He had begun to tremble.

"You despise me because you think I'm so stupid," she said. "You think I'm so inferior to you. And it's true. I'm inferior to Larry too. I admit my inferiority. I admit my brain isn't developed like yours."

"There's nothing wrong with—"

"Maybe someday your brain will get injured, somehow," she said suddenly.

Since they had met David had insisted upon telling himself that their love was only a prelude to another state, another condition of permanent, legal love. Had it not become an understanding between them, without their ever discussing it, that they would be married someday? The word *love* had come to evoke in David an eerie, precarious expectation, since it was something he evidently possessed yet at the same time did not possess. If he tried to envision what he meant by "love" he could think only of isolated moments in his life: Carol listening to him play the piano at a friend's house, meekly attentive as if in the presence of great art (thus revealing her own curious failure of taste!), Carol standing beside her husband and tugging childishly at his arm, when they had once met David by accident on the street, and he had become dizzy with the rush of knowledge that he and this strange aloof woman shared a secret life together—yet was this not also evidence of her flat, commonplace failure of taste? She hated other women, yet she was not so different from them. She insisted that one of his recording of a Mozart violin concerto was poor because the violinist was "weak," but when he questioned her about this she became irritated at him. Her criticism of everything they were to take as aristocratic; his criticism of things they were to take as cranky and dull, hints that he found fault in her as well. "You're just like Larry," she would say pointlessly, knowing how this hurt him if only because he in no way understood what she meant. Watching her, now, her half-closed eyes, he had the sudden desire to wait outside her house some night until she and Larry left, and then break in somehow, working shrewdly and calmly as his own thief. He would then wander through their pretentious brick home and open drawers and cupboard doors and closets, taking nothing but looking everywhere, everywhere, in the medicine cabinet he had always wanted to look into while visiting them but had never dared to, in their refrigerator, in the basement, in the attic, in Larry's papers, in Carol's sweet expensive clothes. He would overlook nothing, he would penetrate into their secret lives, drawn so close to them finally that his life would in a way fuse with theirs: and was that not what he wanted? Did he not want to enter their lives somehow, break brutally into them, inflict permanently upon both of them (suave successful couple!) the violence of which no one supposed him capable? Yet it was true, he thought as she groped to cover his hand with hers, that if he were to marry her they would have no afternoons like these. They would not bother to have lunch together. She would await him at home, he would stay after school to talk with students or colleagues, being in no hurry, on his way home he would stop at a store to pick up something for dinner, she would come to the door in flat-heeled shoes. Her wan indifferent beauty would come alive for him rarely, for it was a beauty possible only because it was unattainable, and it would never survive damp towels hanging crookedly in the bathroom or chipped fingernails or the callous selfish nights of sleeping together, hundreds and thousands of nights when they would be separated for hours by a blank emotionless wall of sleep: as if the drugged

THE MONTH WITH THIRTY THREE DAYS

In the month with thirty three days
I lost the calendar of always
among the dirty dishes
in the sink.

Or took it out with the garbage.
With the old newspapers
and the old news.

I didn't like the picture.
None of the recipes tasted good.
None of the medicines helped me get well.
The stars still move for me
in bunches.

In the month with thirty three days
I don't remember
how I was five years ago
how it was yesterday
how the air smelled as it blew
through the books with the glass pages
how it slipped through my eyes.

For the time being
I live on a pig farm.
It must be almost spring.
The ice in the pond has melted
and one pig has drowned.
The others run around and eat and fuck
piggy-back in the field.
They sound very vicious sometimes.
They scratch themselves on the trees.

The trees slide quietly beneath the bark.

Like small still places
like something loved very much
the buds slowly open.

Norman Hoegberg

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sleep of night were anything like this! When they ate together even now David could sense the eerie selfishness of their actions, each of them tending himself, performing for the other; and he understood this to be the final barrier between them and between all people, a faceless wall of selfishness no one could overcome.

"Are you asleep?" he said.

"No, I'm thinking."

"About what?"

"Something."

She disappointed him by opening her eyes. She looked quite awake. "I guess I want a cigarette."

He got her one. "I feel funny being here," she said, "after what happened."

"Nothing happened."

"But, you know, someone breaking in . . . Emptying your drawers, snooping in everyhere . . . . God! Someone took a hundred dollars out of Larry's room once, at college. And me . . . I'm sure I was robbed, at school or somewhere, even if I didn't know about it."

"What?"

"I'm sure I've been robbed, off and on, all my life," she said. "Even if I didn't know about it."

"But what a preposterous thing to say!"

"Why is it preposterous? You don't understand."

"Oh, hell. What were you going to say before?"

"When?"

"You said you were thinking of something."

"Oh, yes, well—Something—" She smoked the cigarette like a child, sucking at it. He hated her to smoke but she seemed not to care about his distaste. "I might have something to tell you."

He looked down to conceal his fear. "About us?"

"Well, no. About me."

"Then it's about me too."

"That's nice of you to say," she said. She rubbed her forehead against his cheek. Her skin was cool, but he supposed his warm and damp. You're very nice. And you are happy, you still are. I didn't mean what I said before."

He smiled without humor. She was always retracting what she had "said before," whispering away the brittle self she had exposed to him sometime "before," trying to heal his wounds, restore his pride in himself, blind him to the obvious fact that he loved her more than she loved him, that she had agreed to love him because she felt, passively, the wonderful hungry strength of his love, and this gave her something to do and obscured for her the relentless emptiness of her own life. She had explained her marriage to her husband by saying that he had loved her too much, she could do nothing about it. Before emotion in others, true passionate emotion, she was always helpless, so she said; and this helped David to see that she must feel, as he did, her meek contemptuous passivity to be a kind of sickness. "Do you remember that time you were at Steve's party, with that girl? The girl that talked so much? And we had just had a fight the day before, and I waited for you to talk to me—"

"What about it?"

"You were so nice then," she said. "You were wearing the necktie I gave you."

"I put it on by accident," he said bitterly.

Carol laughed. In that instant it seemed to David that he could make out, clearly, the defiant skull beneath her gentle skin: a vision Carol herself would never have. He stared at her in a kind of horror, as if she were doomed, already touched by the rot of death. He wanted to seize her and press his damp face against her body, obliterate somehow that image; but he could do nothing. She said, "What are you going to do tonight?"

"I don't know. Nothing."

"We're having dinner with the Bonds. I don't like them particularly, but Larry likes Steve." She smiled at something. She had thought of something else. He could feel a current of excitement enlivening her, moving her pallid arms, her white shoulders, an excitement that had no object. He wanted to tell her bitterly that she was going to die, and what could she do about that? He would outlive her. He would see her dead. He would see her husband dead. What could she do about that?

After she left he was exhausted. He sat at the kitchen table, holding his head. He felt weak, victimized, frightened, and he could not say why. When he lifted his pounding head his eyes focused upon something incidental—a corner of the dead-white stove—and it occurred to him suddenly that other things had been stolen as well, things he would never regain. Not just the snapshots and the typewriter, but other things. He opened the refrigerator and took out a can of beer. It seemed to him he had had more cans of beer the day before, but he could not be certain. He opened the can and drank from it. Beer ran in a swift dribblet down his chin. "Damn it," he said. He went into the living room. Blank areas of space seemed to rush at him: what was missing? The apartment house furniture, sleek modern pseudo-Danish, told him nothing. Only the rug there was his own, a small expensive rug of rich blue wool with gray stripes. There was an ash tray missing, he saw. His heart had begun to beat rapidly. He hurried in the bedroom and saw the ash tray at once, on the bureau. He felt no relief. He went to put the shade up. His room was on the third floor of a fairly respectable apartment house, but its back windows looked out on an alley-way with great concrete garbage containers here and there along it. From the front the building looked elegant, made of dark brick and ornamented with splendid groupings of trees and crescents of rich green grass, but from the back it looked like a tenement.

He opened the window, but the fine air did not revive him. He felt vaguely sick and put the beer down. Awkwardly he went to the bed and began to straighten it, remembering that the thief had seen the bed unmade also. The thief had seen everything. Then it occurred to him to look in his closet, and he forgot about the bed. He stood fingering the sleeves of his suit coats, trying to remember what he owned, what was perhaps missing. Why had he thought only of money? If it was money the thief had wanted, David would surely

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have given it to him, if only the thief would not take—and yet he could not think of what he meant, what was frightening him. What had the thief taken? How would he ever know how much the thief had taken, how could he hope to assess it? How would he ever have known—and this was the most subtle, the most terrifying thought of all—that the thief had even visited him, if the thief had not deliberately snatched things out of their places and thrown them down?

He checked his shoes. Evidently none were missing. His ties hung on a rack and he began to fumble through them, fingering the fabric of each as if he were trying to recognize it. It struck him suddenly that there were ties missing. His head ached. He squinted at the ties, looking for the one Carol had given him. Several ties fell to the floor and he kicked them impatiently. The tie had been dark with brown stripes, the sort of pretentious conservative thing Larry always wore; now it was gone. Nervously he looked through the ties again, then again. It was gone. Or had he confused it with one of Larry's, having seen Larry wear one like that? Perhaps Carol had given him another one. He wanted to call her to find out. But the thought of waiting for her to answer made his stomach cringe: for if she did answer she would suck out his soul over the telephone, with her soft sweet mouth she would lure his spirit out and consume it, swallow it utterly. Why had he not shot back at her during one of their arguments, when she had said she hated him, that he hated her too? That beneath his helpless dependent love for her he sustained a violent, lively hatred for her and her life, everything she owned, had stolen, had taken selfish possession of, and for her husband, and beyond him David's own colleagues who possessed so much only because David himself possessed so little?—and, beyond this jumble of people, he felt hatred for those who had befriended him when he was a child, who had stirred up his love only to take it from him and finally to leave him, that series of pseudo-homes, psuedo-mothers, psuedo-fathers, and at the very back of his mind the sinister figures of his real father and mother, enveloped always in darkness (for he liked to think of them as dead and not living)—Faceless emaciated people, only vaguely male and female, more like the figures of saints painted high on the ceilings of churches, in gold and sliver that denounced flesh: they did not tremble, they did not waver, but remained rigid as if casting a spell upon him, ghostly father and mother, holy and refined out of life itself, churning up in him as he stood with a fistful of unfamiliar neckties brought up close to his face the paralyzing grief he had supposed overcome, forever. It was not their being dead that horrified him, for he desired them so; it was instead their deliberate soulless anonymity, their final indifference, those enshadowed people stolen swiftly out of his life on the day he was born.

III

On Sunday David went out for a walk, as was his custom. He did not like to leave the apartment, but he recognized this as unhealthy, just as he recognized as unhealthy the repeated nightmares he had suffered about the thief. Sometimes it seemed to him that the thief's face was nearly visible; then his vision would blur, the thief would turn nimbly away, all would be lost. On Saturday he had wanted to place his possessions out in the center of each room in order to count them, but he saw this as unhealthy and had refused to do it. He had not called Carol.

But he might have plotted their meeting, so strange was it that he should be lingering by the empty, refuse-littered fountain at the edge of the park just as Carol and her husband came along. They were dressed for Sunday, though they did not go to church: Carol in her new yellow coat, her hair shining in the sun, carrying a gleaming patent leather purse, her husband with his handsome, heavy head, his glasses, wearing a suit David remembered from somewhere, of neat dark fabric that looked expensive. They greeted him politely, he and Larry shook hands. In the presence of this older, successful man, David needed to straighten his shoulders as if to italicize the man's slightly rounded shoulders, but he felt the gesture awkward and useless. "Beautiful day, wonderful weather," Carol's husband said. Carol teetered on patent leather high heels, shy and charming, one gloved hand on her husband's arm. She said slowly, "I want to tell him, honey. Is it all right if I tell him?" "It's up to you," he said. He smiled. He had a broad, patient face, cheeks slightly flushed with the beauty of this April day, looking perhaps five or more years older than thirty-eight. Carol stared at David and then past him, lowered her gaze, smiled in confusion, breathless as David had never seen her before, and suddenly his heart felt pierced by the shy nervous flash of her teeth. Standing between husband and lover she was bathed in happiness as if in sunlight, the complete enviable selfishness of her joy blocking out any hatred David might feel—David of rented, furnished apartments, with windows staring out into alleys!

Before Carol could finish her coy announcement he interrupted. "You'll be interested to know that I found the thief," he said coldly.

"The thief? What thief?" said her husband.

"But who is it?" cried Carol. She stared at him. "It isn't anyone we know, is it?"

There was a long silence. David was already retreating. Despite the pain in his head he smiled at them, backing up, doing homage to their unity by the very way he retreated by holding his arms in a half-embrace, hardly the suggestion of an embrace: the two of them together, and that tiny seaweed-like creature secret in Carol's body, already stolen from David and appropriated and named for someone else.

He thought to himself that he must be cautious the rest of his life, for the world belonged unmistakably to the great conspiring skillful world of thieves who awaited the slightest lapse of attention on the part of the innocent.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When The Two-Wheeler Was King

Bill Murphy

"How come you never ride your bicycle to school any more, Son?"

That's what I asked him and I knew as soon as I said it that I'd said a ridiculous thing. I could tell from the oh-for-Pete's sake kind of pitying look he gave me—the one he always gives me when I make one of those hopelessly-uninformed, parent-type remarks. At first I thought maybe he thought I'd said tricycle instead of bicycle but then he gave me the word:

"I'm in the tenth now, Dad," he said. "You don't ride two-wheelers in the tenth."

This surprised me a little, because when I went to school it was considered good form to ride a two-wheeler, not only in the tenth but also the eleventh and twelfth; especially if it had a spinner or foxtail on the handlebars. But it didn't surprise me too much because I've come to realize that the way things were when I went to school doesn't impress today's scholar enough to get excited about, one way or the other.

Even so, I couldn't help going out and taking a long look at the gleaming, mint-condition ten-speed. And I couldn't help thinking how it would have been to have a bike like that when I went to school, and remembering how it was with bikes in the old days . . .

I became aware of bicycles at an early age, by getting my finger stuck in a bicycle chain—it's practically impossible to remain unaware of bicycles in a situation like that. Years later my mother seemed amazed that I recalled the event.

"Why you couldn't possibly remember that!" she said. "You were only two years old at the time."

Which just goes to show that my mother never had her finger stuck in a bicycle chain.

The wheels of this particular disaster were powered, more or less typically, by a female. A five-year-old redhead, she had managed to get this old bike turned upside-down on the floor of her father's garage and she was spinning the pedals by hand. She was doing a bang-up job of it too—the rear wheel was really singing.

Naturally, I was eager to participate in the sport. I made several grabs for the pedals but, as redheads sometimes will, she kept pushing me away. So I stuck my finger in the chain to teach her a lesson. Everything ground to a halt, including my finger, now jammed firmly in place between chain and sprocket.

Anyone who thinks that didn't smart hasn't has his finger mashed into hamburger by a bicycle chain lately. I suffered not in silence and, judging from the number of people who came to investigate, I must have had pretty good lungs in those days.

Now, there must have been a master link in that chain and, as any bicycle man knows, a master link is easily taken apart. But if any of my rescuers was aware of that fact he held his peace. They finally got me loose by turning the pedals until my finger went all the way around the sprocket. That took, as I recall, about three or four years and it didn't feel a bit better coming out than it did going in.

When Mother saw my finger she nearly fainted. She was sure it would never be the same again, which, in fact, it wasn't. It's still quite flat in one spot and it still aches in cold weather, or whenever I hit it with a hammer.

In my youthful reaction to the incident I didn't dwell overly long on the cause and effect relationships of how my finger had got into the chain. My general impressions were that (1), the bicycle had somehow been the aggressor and (2), anything which could bite like that deserved a lot of respect. For months afterwards I toddled wide circles around every bicycle I met, with my hands behind my back.

But as time wore on it became increasingly obvious that a bicycle seldom attacks unless provoked and, having achieved a high degree of bicycle awareness, I began to yearn for a more intimate relationship. By the age of five I was riding, after a fashion, the only two-wheeler on the place, an elderly bicycle of sorts which my mother had ridden as a girl. It had a drive shaft instead of a chain, and solid rubber tires. It may have come over on the Mayflower.

If it hadn't been a girl's bike, I couldn't have ridden it at all, being much too small to straddle the crossbar of a boy's bike. I had to do all my riding standing up and even then my head barely cleared the handlebars. I learned to ride by hopping aboard at the top of a hill and letting nature take its course, learning in the first few trips that nature's course can be pretty rough on the appearance and general well being both of boys and bikes.

The more I rode, the more I learned. I found out that when you ride a bike without fenders on a rainy day you get a steady stream of splatter up your front and another up your back. I discovered what happens when you make sharp turns when riding on ice. And I learned that when you ride through deep slush on a spring afternoon and then come back next morning when the slush has frozen and try to ride in the frozen ruts it doesn't work.

There was a lot of prestige value in having a bike—most any old bike—in those days. The society wasn't nearly so affluent then and new bicycles didn't grow on Christmas trees, automatically, the way they do now.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I got my first real bike (boy's bike) at about age ten. It was considerably older than I was and cost me a BB gun and $5, which I saved during summer vacations by garden-weeding, berry-picking and fly-killing. (I killed the flies for my grandmother at 1c per dozen. I still feel kind of guilty because I killed a lot of them in the barn, which was cheating.)

No kid was ever happier with a bike than I was with that first one, even if it didn't have all the latest features. One feature it didn't have was a coaster brake. It was the old direct-drive type, wherein pedals and rear wheel turned together at all times, dedicated to the proposition that as long as you kept both feet on the pedals everything was under control.

Only thing was, on a steep downgrade you could go a lot faster, feet-off. And once those pedals wound up to a blur, human feet just couldn't catch up—trying to was like wrestling a king-size electric fan. Since there were several bikes of this type in town, and since the cosater-brakes on most of the others were old and feeble, the cyclist of the period was frequently forced to resort to emergency braking procedures.

One system was simply to leave the road and try to hit something soft (a very effective method, say survivors). Another involved dragging your feet on the road (which was rough on sneakers as well as on kids after parents had seen the sneakers). But the favorite method, assuming the bike had no front fender (a pretty safe assumption in our crowd) was to cause a bind on the front wheel by wedging one foot between the fork and the tire (this was also rough on sneakers but not nearly as rough as foot-dragging).

A serious disadvantage of the foot-wedging method came to light one day when I wedged too tightly at relatively low speed. Suddenly, my foot jammed solidly between fork and tire, stopping the front wheel cold. The rest of the bike and I, in accordance with one or another of Newton's laws, kept on going—up and over —pivoting 180 degrees around the suddenly-stopped front axle. This drove my head into the ground with considerable force and, even though it luckily occurred on a dirt road rather than pavement, there are those who say I've never been the same since.

The effectiveness of both foot-wedging and foot-dragging was compromised by the fact that we often rode barefoot. Either of these techniques was even rougher on bare feet than on sneakers; and, in the case of a panic stop, resulted in a sensation of such intensity as to render the standard hotfoot positively soothing by comparison. Also, there was the danger of getting your bare feet tangled up in the spokes. This can be quite uncomfortable if experienced at high speeds, according to my old pal, "Two-Toes" McKinley.

Later on I traded "up" to a bike with a coaster-brake of sorts but it never worked quite right. I had to keep taking it apart and adding washers and things to keep it working at all, and it's still hard to believe there could be so many parts in one little mechanism that could be put together in so many wrong ways. Occasionally I'd get it together in such a way that everything worked all right with the exception of the clutch, which would slip dramatically at odd moments. When this happened on a boy's bike while you were pumping hard uphill, standing with all your weight on a pedal at the top of the stroke, and it suddenly let go, it was an experience to long remember.

It took a lot of maintenance to keep those old bikes operational, especially the tires. They were the high pressure type, with no tubes you could patch. If you had money you could buy brass screw-in repair plates which went *clack, clack, clack* when you rode on concrete; or you could buy a gun which shot rubber bands into the leak, and which sometimes worked. But most of us learned to fix leaks just by squirting shellac or sometimes molasses in through the valve. If the leak was a big one we would also wrap the tire with friction tape and that would go *thump, thump, thump* when you rode but it usually did the job.

There was a lot of competition among the bicycle riders in my town. The main idea was to see who could do the nuttiest things without getting killed. One of our favorite stunts was to ride standing up on the seat or crossbar while going down steep hills, and it was a good trick when it worked. Another was to see who could ride the furthest, "no-hands," with his eyes shut. I think most of us cheated a little at this, sneaking a peek now and then to get some idea of where we were headed. At least I know I did. But there was one guy, "Goofus" O'Malley, who I guess played it fairly straight, because he kept running full bore into trees and things. He got to acting a little peculiar after a while.

Bicycle riding in those days could be rough on trousers and legs—partly because few of our bicycles had chain guards and unless you remembered to wear a clip or rubber band on your pants leg, it kept getting tangled up in the chain—but mainly because the legs of a bike rider are in a handy position for man's best friend to chew on. It seemed to me that every citizen in or within five miles of our town had a hobby of raising huge dogs, specially trained to do nothing but chew on, or try to chew on, bicycle riders' legs.

Actually, not all of them would bite. Some would come tearing after you with blood-chilling yowls and howls and then do nothing but run alongside snarling and nipping at the tires. And then there was the other kind. You could tell which kind you were dealing with by just calmly riding along and waiting to see what happened. Or you could do what I usually did: pedal with great vigor and try to stay far enough ahead to avoid finding out.

Normally, this wasn't too much of a problem but there were exceptions. A notable one involved two big German police dogs on a farm just outside town, hard by one of my accustomed cycling routes. For some reason best known to the dogs they ignored me in the daytime but after dark, which was often the case on my homeward trips, they seemed possessed with the notion that anything on a bike should be torn asunder.

There was no sneaking by them either; they must have had radar or something. They'd pick me up on their scopes about a quarter mile away and come roaring

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down across a hayfield to intercept at the road, turning my backbone to jelly with an oral ferociousness which would have shamed a whole pack of Baskerville hounds. Luckily there was nearly a mile of downgrade at this point and in the first few skirmishes I was able to get by before they reached the road. Once I was out in front, pouring on the coal, they couldn't begin to catch me.

But after a while they caught on to the idea of leading me—heading me off at the pass as it were—and I found myself facing a road full of teeth. Thanks to the long downgrade I could take evasive action of sorts by pumping like crazy up to the last second, then getting my feet up on the handlebars, coasting, and hoping for the best. Even so, there wasn't much margin of safety because those were big dogs. It was always a hair-tingling trip with those two sets of great white fangs chopping away on either side, maybe missing by an inch or so. That would go on for about a quarter mile before they'd give up and there was never any assurance that the next chop wouldn't connect.

It was on that same dog-infested road that I reached, one night, what was probably the highest point of my cycling career. I had succesfully run the gantlet of snarls and fangs and, filled with happy relief, I was still coasting, feet still on handlebars when I reached the steepest part of the hill. I don't know how fast I was going that night but bicycles have been clocked at better than 35 mph on that stretch. It was a cloudy night, with no moon. There were no street lights in the area, and bicycle lights were something the rich kids had.

To understand what happened you have to realize how dark it was. This was timber country, with forest on each side of the road, and visibility at ground level was absolute zero. But even on the darkest nights the sky is always a little lighter than the forest. I could navigate by staying lined up with the center of this faint swatch of overhead luminescence and I'd never had any trouble staying on the road.

It all came as a big surprise to me, therefore, when, sailing smoothly along, I encountered this shattering impact—then realized I had suddenly become airborne. I don't know how far I flew but I eventually came down, of course, in accordance with another of Mr. Newton's reliable laws. And I recall being even more surprised when, instead of crashing down on hard pavement or a pile of rocks, I landed on something relatively soft and yielding and which made a noice that sounded like "Oomph!"

Then, a split-second later, I was surprised again, less pleasantly, when the bicycle came down on me with a crash and things got kind of fuzzy for a minute. When that cleared up a little I noticed that something underneath me was squirming around and making the kind of noises a person who has had all the wind knocked out of him sometimes makes. I couldn't see what it was but I began to suspect it might be alive, so I got up off it and helped it up and asked it if it was all right.

After quite a bit of groaning and wheezing it said, in a shaky, gasping voice, that it guessed so. Then the voice gradually picked up steam and began to curse people who coast down hills in big trucks without lights. I could tell that the voice was that of a male adult but it didn't sound like anyone I know—although, charged with emotion and bitterness as it was, it might have been hard to recognize in any case.

I thought of pointing out that if he had been prudent enough to carry a lantern all this might have been avoided, but decided against it. Instead, I felt around, located my bike and resumed my journey. Things were beat up pretty badly and what with the shrilling of chafing tires and clatter of broken spokes, it made a lot of noise. But even over all the racket I could still hear him carrying on back there, most of the way home.

I laid low for a few days, saying nothing and keeping one eye peeled for a possibly limping, heavily bandaged and irate citizen. But he never showed up. I never did find out who I collided with that night and I was happy to leave it that way—but I kind of hope it was the farmer with the big German police dogs.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE DELTA TRACTOR DRIVER

AND

MR. CHARLIE

Frederick Marshall Finney

If you travel southward from Memphis into the Mississippi Delta country you will find yourself on some of the worst roads in the United States. It will be like entering a new world, backwards in time, an age gone by. In Spring you get a strange feeling as the land is wide and spacious. You look out over the countryside and see nothing but wide long plowed fields. Only this year there will be less of these than you would have seen last year. You look right and left and the fields are there. Occasionally there will be a low overhanging tree weighted down with moss. The Old South of slaves and plantations with beautiful southern belles comes to your mind. Then you think of nightriders who roam the roads. You note that you are still a long way from the next town, Clarksdale. A slight shudder comes over you, and you find yourself looking around not trusting the rear view mirror. You think of the yankee plates on your car . . . but no evil eyed men appear, no hooded men. The sun still shines. The road gets worse.

You have to slow down. Across the field you see a huge tractor turning the rich black top soil. The tractor driver waves at you. The road is so bad you are driving slow; you can wave back. There is something about the scene that catches the eye. The tractor driver is a Negro, the tractor is one of those big wide-wheeled expensive jobs. You travel on a little further. You notice another big tractor turning the soil, only this one is closer. You stop and get out to watch the scene. You walk over and pick up a handful of the rich soil. Man what rich soil, what blessed earth!

The tractor driver is now coming your way to turn the portion you have crossed. You now note what caught your eye earlier: the outfit that the driver wears. A red baseball type hat. His clothes appear to be tailored, as they are tight fitting. But the driver is sweating, so perhaps the sweat makes his garments cling to his body. He smiles and greets you and then passes on. You hear the music from a rock and roll station, only the music is waydown rhythm-and-blues sounds like Howlin' Wolf. You watch as he passes by. He seems to lean forward somewhat like a cowboy of the old West. Then you think what a joy it would have been to the cowboys of old if they had had transistor radios to fill the time on long lonely cattle drives. You get into your car and continue on your way. As you do you see many more plantation cowboys, most wearing those caps or big widebrimmed hats.

Greenville is the center of the Northwest Mississippi Delta country. The chamber of commerce takes pride in pointing out that it is the marketing center for the Northwest Mississippi, Southwest Arkansas, and Northeast Louisiana area, as it sits on the Mississippi River across from Louisiana and Arkansas. It is a hustling little town of 40,000 (fourth largest in Mississippi). It is the home of Pulitzer Prize winner Hodding Carter, Sr., and the rest of his kin, the headquarters of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee field operations for the area, the headquarters of the northern staffed Delta Ministry, and its population is 65% Negro. Its residents both white and Negro say it is the best city in Mississippi. Although a white resident made this statement he complained, "Hodding Carter and the niggers run this town." This couldn't be a fact because there are no Negroes holding public office, nor does Mr. Carter hold office, segregation still exists, the whites and Negroes are constantly engaging in verbal spats. The only difference between Greenville and some other towns is that here Negroes are not shot for "getting out of their place." Mr. Carter's biggest sin seems to be that he sells newspapers, and sells more newspapers to Negroes than whites. The Carter family *Delta Democrat Times* is the town's only newspaper and covers news like any paper should; it gets the facts. The trouble is that most of the news in Greenville concerns SNICK, NAACP, integrating the public schools, Negroes, and lately the Delta Ministry. The latter organization will greatly affect the tractor driving scenes you saw on the road from Memphis.

The modern day Delta tractor driver is a big man on the plantations around Greenville and the rest of the Delta. One man replaces several teams of mules and men of days past. This is mechanization at its best from plowing to harvesting. One big cotton picker replaces a truck load of day laborers. The savings to the plantation owners are tremendous.

Delta tractor drivers draw top wages. But top wages aren't very high, only $14 a day at most for sometimes as much as 14 hours work. The plantation owners clearly do not realize how important the tractor drivers are.

The Delta tractor drivers range in age from 16 to 50, in most cases. Most have large families that live on the plantations they work and sometimes do contract work through their bosess for other planters. They enjoy a certain hero-worship, especially among rural Negro youth and the young city dayworkers who work chop cotton and hoe on the farms. The urban-minded

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

adult Negroes of Greenville sometimes regard the Delta tractor drivers as ruffians who come into town on the weekends and raise hell and spend their money. The tractor drivers spend their money, drink their liquor, and give the young women a good time. They also make the old women think they are young. Of course, all of this is fine with Mr. Charley, the plantation boss, for the tractor drivers and everybody else remain happy. But Civil Rights has entered the picture and things have begun to change.

The Delta Ministry has sought to improve the wages and general conditions of the tractor drivers and other plantation workers. The farm families have responded. There have been strikes. Mr. Charley has responded by kicking the farm families off his place. Some have done so because of pressure from their neighbors. One plantation owner was even found sneaking food to one of his former workers. Things like this can only be understood by looking into the Mississippi mind.

Tent cities have sprung up in the Delta. One group even seized the abandoned Greenville Air Force Base and held up there until the Air Force took it back. Another group went to Washington and pitched camp across from the White House, but Mr. Johnson didn't have time to see them, and no one seemed quite sure what to do about the situation. Someone suggested that the Greenville Base be re-taken, after all a sign leading to the base says U.S. Government Reservation. In all of this Mr. Charley, the plantation owner, says he can't undertsand what the trouble is. He says he's always treated *his folks* right. The tractor drivers say something is wrong, "things just ain't right, and they ought to be."

So, if you travel south from Memphis through the Mississippi Delta country and you see a tractor driver turning the rich fertile soil, stop and look at the good earth, marvel at the skill of the man. Next year you may not be able to see this scene.

THE CONDEMNED

For Caryl Chessman, 1921-1960

More years ago than now I started dying,
though no one there would ever tell me so,
nor anyone betray the fact by crying.
It was a false and hearty gathering
that stood by my white bed in the white room,
exchanging jokes to dissipate the gloom
that haloed me. I was the weathervane
ignoring the sun, pointing to their rain.
Father, you who produced me from a fleck
of matter, did you prophesy the wreck
you launched when, riding your furious bed,
you did as all men do? What I am weathering
now is true of me, but this is true of you:
you hurled me through life's passage, and I died.

William Childress

REFLECTIONS OF A VOLUNTEER FIREMAN

Ernest Earnest

Children picking up our bones
Will never know that these were once
As quick as foxes on the hill;

WALLACE STEVENS, A POSTCARD FROM THE VOLCANO

I have a photograph of my grandfather in a fireman's shirt and helmet of the 1870's. He was much more handsome than I am in my volunteer fireman's outfit of the 1960's. But I have a feeling that the ninety years between would not have obscured our common purpose, nor have made communication difficult. Yes, I should have to explain to him some of the technological differences betweeen a modern thousand-gallon-a-minute pumper and his hand operated engine. But the basic principles of both are the same. And our motivations and human relationships are undoubtedly very much the same. Each of us has known the long, unpaid hours on the job; each of us would recognize the same colleagues: the daredevil, the goofoff, the dependable worker—the man who helps to roll up the hose after the excitement is over.

In other respects our lives are far different. He raised his own vegetables, butchered his own hogs, smoked his own bacon and ham. I teach in an urban university and eat factory-frozen foods. Perhaps in all history the daily lives of people have never changed as rapidly as the patterns of the lives of my grandparents and my own.

This statement about the recent rapidity of social change is a cliché. But its psychological implications are even now difficult to grasp. The skills my grandfather learned from his father and grandfather—how to harness a horse, butcher a hog, make dandelion wine or sauerkraut—were still useful throughout most of his life. When I was a child, he taught me some of his skills—none of which was useful to me after the age of sixteen. By then I was learning to fit brake bands into a Model T Ford—a skill which of course I could not pass on to my sons, who were souping up V8's.

All this is symbolic of the difficulties of the modern educator. Bliss Perry reported that when his son entered Williams College in 1916, the first Latin assignment was the same as that of the boy's grandfather sixty years before. Today the science of twenty years ago is obsolete. The physicist can no longer teach what he learned in graduate school; indeed a fifty-year old physicist is less likely to be regarded as a sage than

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a has-been. Even in the humanities the critical theories of a generation ago are now outmoded. True, Harvard still carries Kittredge's *Chaucer and His Poetry* on its reading list, but newly-minted Ph.D.'s regard this as a quaint survival. They are going in for "close reading," myth and symbol.

Apart from mere academic fashions, there is the rapid shift in sensibility. I am thinking not only of such obvious shifts as the kind that makes the pathos of Dickens seem bathos today. Even today's students can respond to Thoreau, Henry James, and Ernest Hemingway. In fact some students at Berkeley seem to be responding too enthusiastically to Thoreau. But how can a city boy or girl, who has never seen a sleigh outside of an antique shop, get the sensuous basis of Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"? For today's youth, a snow storm has the connotations of putting on tire chains or a breakdown of city transportation. To Thomas Wolfe, the early morning clop of the milkman's horse brought a tremendous sense of loneliness; to students now it is merely a verbal symbol.

Even common words have lost their connotative meanings. What, for instance does "give us this day our daily bread" mean to a generation nurtured on hamburgers? Or, "the sweat of one's brow" connote in an air-conditioned office? Or Housman's "I hoed, and trenched, and weeded" in an asphalt world? Yes, they remain as symbols, but they have entirely lost the physical, and therefore psychological, impact that they once had. It is the difference in sensory response between "ham" as applied to the canned product in a supermarket and to a home smoked one seasoning in a fragrant cellar. It is like Coleridge's, "I see, not feel how beautiful they are."

All this may seem far removed from volunteer fire companies. But as I suggested earlier, the contemporary volunteer fireman may be closer physically and psychologically to his grandfather or great grandfather than is today's scholar or reader. A college student today has no visceral or neural memories of the sound of sleigh bells when he reads about them in a poem. But when the siren blows, the twenty-year old fireman undoubtedly experiences in his innards much the same sensations which my grandfather did when the bell in the firehouse tower began to clang. The same automatic mechanism pumps adrenalin into his veins.

A young man accustomed to the Kerouac-Mailer view of sex can surely understand little of the feeling Keats expressed in "Bright star would I were steadfast as thou art." But the volunteer fireman using his spare time to shine up the pumper for the Fourth-of-July parade is re-experiencing the same love affair with the engine that his ancestor knew a hundred years ago when shining up the brilliant decorations on a hand pumped machine—also for a Fourth-of-July parade.

The volunteer fire company is one of the few conservators of tradition in a nation notorious for its disregard of tradition. Today when a new $30,000 piece of equipment is purchased, it is "housed" in a traditional ceremony to which other fire companies are invited. As men did a hundred years ago the firemen push the apparatus into the house three times. Because of the present high cost of equipment almost all volunteer companies receive some public support; it is usually impossible to raise by subscription the $50,000 to $500,000 needed for building, apparatus, and equipment. But few volunteer companies rely on tax support alone. As is traditional, they solicit contributions from the local citizenry, and in areas where the police do not frown on the practice, they hold raffles of one sort or another. As my grandfather did, his spiritual great grandsons drift down to the firehouse in their spare time to spin yarns, refurbish equipment, and play poker.

All this may seem like an account of life in a village remote from the modern world, an anachronism like a sonnet to a lady's eyebrow. However the activities I have described are those of volunteer firemen in the Main Line suburbs of Philadelphia or of nearly 4,000 other companies in Pennsylvania alone, including cities like Harrisburg and Reading. In an era becoming notorious for non-involvement in the predicaments of others, thousands of volunteer firemen are instantly ready to aid, not only at a fire, but in a hurricane or a bad accident. Many fire companies maintain auxiliaries which furnish ambulance service. The amount of donated service is sometimes very great. In the past two months my own company spent eighteen hours at a big house fire a mile from a hydrant; and several days, in shifts, at a box company where huge rolls of paper smouldered for two weeks. Even when there is no fire, the men drill regularly, test thousands of feet of hose, learn to use complex equipment.

The alleged amount of leisure produced by the machine age does not impress a fireman who has spent a whole evening packing hose back on the truck. Grandfather may have taken his regular turn at the brakes during a night-long fire; he did not have 4000 feet of hose to pack afterward. But the sweating men of both eras kept their minds on the cold beer at the end of the job.

This sense of shared sensibility with my grandfather as a volunteer fireman is all the more remarkable when compared to other areas of life. The ways college men of my father's generation felt and thought, as reflected in Charles Flandrau's *Harvard Episodes* and Owen Wister's *Philosophy 4,* were so different from the sensibilities of my contemporaries that a considerable hostility developed. The "Bullfrog-on-the-Bank" generation could not understand our enthusiasm for jazz and Mencken's *Mercury*. And of course my generation finds sandals, beards, stretch pants, or the foul-speech cult at Berkeley somewhat incomprehensible. We feel a physical revulsion to girls with dirty hair—an emotion apparently not shared by boys with dirty feet.

Wallace Stevens was mainly right about the children picking up our bones. But I find that the eighteen-year-old rookie fireman feels exactly as I do, physically and emotionally, at getting out of bed at two A.M. on a winter night. He expresses his emotion in the same language. It was the way my grandfather felt and spoke.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Point of Decision

Albert W. Vogel

TRANS-WORLD AIRLINE: There really was such an airline and I was really meeting its incoming flight.

I walked around until the flight was announced, and then I walked toward the gate looking for her, and in a minute she was coming through the same gate looking for me.

She'd lost weight, I thought. But what had I expected after all these years? It didn't matter. As she walked toward me love filled me and it was hard for me to believe that it had been eight years since we'd been students together and since I'd asked her to marry me.

Our lives had changed in those eight years. We were educated now. We were called *professor*. I was married; she'd had lovers.

Young people were going by me as I waited for her to pass through the gate, and I'm sure that some of them were my students on their way home, or to Africa, or wherever it is these days that students go at the end of the school year.

I wondered whether they knew that I was meeting a woman who was not my wife, and then I wondered whether it really mattered.

Of course it didn't matter—the students were no threat to me. Perhaps the occasional visiting professor or the departing colleague were threats. But threats to what? Think of all that I was willing to throw over for Ella. Could they threaten me if I cared for none of their conventions nor for what I would lose?

And yet I was frightened. Desperate and frightened. After eight years I wanted to run out and to hold her close to me and tell her that I still loved her and that it was possible to begin everything again.

Instead, we shook hands. The accumulated experience of the race has invented the necessary lies to cover all such situations. We were two colleagues meeting and shaking hands in public. And so I had told my wife the night before: "I'm meeting Dr. Hunter coming in for Summer Session, 7:55 at the airport.

At the TWA counter I'd asked whether Dr. Hunter was arriving on the 7:55.

"Right on time, Dr. Page," the man said. How did he know me? Had he ever been in any of my courses?

I thanked the son-of-a-bitch and then I wanted to cry. Why can't a man of thirty-six who is married be in love with "another woman" without being made to feel guilty? I was meeting a woman and I was going to take her to a borrowed apartment so that we could press our bodies together in private. We were in love. What sort of crime was that?

When she came toward me and shook my hand I was glad that her skirts were short and in style and that she wore eye shadow. Even doctors of philosophy wear short skirts and eye shadow and meet colleagues at 7:55 in the morning.

And who knows or cares where they are taken at that hour.

"I'm glad you're here," I said stupidly, but I don't remember what she said.

We walked together to the parking lot, wanting to hold hands the way young lovers do but fearful of the people who stood around and watched.

"Have you eaten?" I asked once we were in the car.

"Not very much," she said. "I'd like a cup of coffee anyway."

"You should eat more," I said. "You're underweight."

"I'm lonely," she said. "I don't eat much when I'm alone."

I drove to a restaurant near the University talking most of the way about my car, which was new, and which I was fond of. To whom would it go if there were a divorce, I wondered.

I chose the restaurant near the Univeristy so that I could make a story out of it afterwards if we were seen: "Miss Hunter, the Medievalist. We're working on a bibliography together."

After the coffee and on the way back to the car, I told her that I'd borrowed the apartment.

I couldn't know what she was thinking. It had been eight years since I'd told her that I loved her. Since then there had been only a letter or two; usually written about some professional subject. We'd given one another nothing to hope for.

The apartment was a mistake. I'd borrowed it from one of the secretaries in the Department telling her a story about needing to talk to my brother's wife and that she and my wife did not get along. Filth was everywhere and the secretary's dog had been sick in the corner. I should have taken Ella to a hotel, but when I planned things the apartment seemed so much more discreet.

Hotels have been ruined for lovers by businessmen and Government officials on expense accounts, or, so I thought.

Inside the apartment I held her close and kissed her.

"Please," she said. "No."

I asked why.

"You know why," she said. "Eight years is why."

"And I've missed you all these years."

"Have you?" she asked. "Is that why you wrote me five letters about your publications, jobs, and successes."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I wrote only to establish the right to write. I hoped for nothing more. You turned me down then—eight years ago."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Eight years," she echoed me. "I was nineteen then."

"If I was older than you," I said, "I wasn't any more sure of myself. What did I have to offer you. A B.A. in English. I might have taught in high school. I might have gone back into the Air Force. I was frightened."

"And now that you've got a doctorate, now that you're successful, are you less afraid?"

"No," I said. And I meant it as deeply and sincerely as anything I have ever said. But I did not know quite how to put it into words. "Viet Nam," I said. "Russia."

She let me take her in my arms now. Kiss her mouth. "Why did you let me go then?" she asked after our kiss. "Why did you marry that girl?"

"You didn't take me when I offered marriage," my voice was deep and choked.

There was nothing more that we could say on that subject. She had been young, and I had lacked courage. It was as simple as that eight years ago. The question now was what were we going to do with the future.

I asked her that.

"I don't know," she said. "I have a man who wants to marry me."

"A professor too?" I asked.

"Finishing his Ph.D."

"Do you love him?"

"No," she said.

"Promise me you won't marry him," I said.

"Why should I promise?" she asked. "You're married. You have a wife and two children. A home. An established career. What can you offer me?"

I wondered what I could offer her.

She continued: "I couldn't even be your mistress. Medievalists are not all that much in demand. There are two at your University already. If I resigned and moved here, what could I do? You couldn't afford to support me—I'd have to type or grade Freshman themes."

It had come to that inevitable place—the point of decision. All along I had known that it would. I must have, but like any fool, I had hoped to go along in the meanwhile as if the inevitable could be put off forever.

"Do you want me to get a divorce?" I asked.

Somehow saying the word *divorce* made it easier to think about.

"Yes," she said.

"Do you love me all that much?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, and we kissed now as lovers. The issue was clear and decided. We wanted one another.

After the kiss my doubts and fears began to return. I kissed her again and felt her small breast. I loved her and I had loved her all those years.

If I thought anything at all, I thought about my paintings, my books, the house with the study added on. Which way would they go in a settlement?

Would it mean changing jobs again? And what sort of financial arrangements would I have to make for the children?

It would take a while for me to come around to seeing all that was involved, and a while for me to accept it all. Divorce and beginning again are not easy.

But these were things we could not speak of now. We had to give one another time. She was expected in California that evening: there was an afternoon airplane to catch. And then she was off to Wisconsin to work on a book she had promised.

I had summer school to teach and, of course, all the thinking and planning to do: literary men hate lawyers by instinct.

We put all that aside. We kissed. We explored one another. Examined, loved and gave ourselves.

Never had I loved so fully and deliciously.

"I'm shy," she said once as I explored her.

"You're not a virgin," I said. "Why should you be shy?"

"Because I've never been loved like this before." And she held me tight as if to punish me for the years we'd wasted.

Why hadn't this happened eight years ago when we were young and she was still virgin and I had so much before me.

Because it hadn't. That was why, and it was useless to examine dead issues. In minutes she would have to leave to catch an airplane.

In the filthy bathroom we cleaned ourselves up like man and wife. I put my arms around her as she combed her hair and pressed her against me, one hand on her belly the other on her breast.

THE PRODIGAL

From a long way off he sees his family
Coming closer, over the dim
Meadows, the slats of the tall grass
Mother appears, then Father,
Signals flash—
He cries aloud in the silence
But all he startles is insects;
With long, drifting, dream-like steps
Slowly they come, in the late sun
Though he waves his hands, he insists
I am not like this
Mother is milkweed, Father smiles—
He wheels to look for his shadow
But he is himself,
Is he not, is he not?
Even as he retreats
He feels their tears on his cheeks,
In the dust of insects dancing
Still they keep advancing.

Patricia Goedicke

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We'll miss the airplane," she said.

It was probably a hint, but I was too steeped in my own problems to take it up. The responsibilities all lay with me it seemed. If she stayed the night I would either have to leave her to go home to my wife, or stay with her and bring things to a head sooner than I'd expected.

A chain of causality external to myself. I wondered then—as I wonder now—when I will be free of it.

All the way to the airport she held my thigh.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I wish the apartment had been nicer. I wanted it to be beautiful, all of it, the environment, everything."

"It's no one's fault," she said. "Nothing is ever anyone's fault. I gave you nothing to hope for in my letters. We never spoke of love—only bibliographies.

At the airport we waited for the plane to be announced. It was late, and I made an excuse so that I could leave. It was more than I could bear to be by her and not hold her hand or kiss her before she walked away.

"Next time it will be different," I said as I left.

"And when will that be?" she asked. "We haven't talked about a next time."

I'd been careful to promise her nothing. All I could think about now was the scandal and the legal, economic, and professional problems.

"Soon," I said. Wondering what I meant, anxious to go.

"In our marriage bed," she said, and although it was not a question, it was said as if she feared being hurt by my reply.

I wondered whether I had promised her that. And on the drive home, I wondered whether I had promised her anything less.

There were still secrets I had to keep. Things must not be allowed to go forward too quickly. I would have to write to her and define my position; and then I would have have to await her answer and see how things would have to go with her. We would be like nations negotiating a treaty.

At home my wife would soon be preparing supper. And soon the children would become irritable because it was that time of day. I would be irritable for weeks to come and until things sorted themselves out and the lawyers had had their day.

In the meanwhile my wife's sure instinct would tell her that I was in love with someone other than herself. It would be hard on the children when it came, but I couldn't let myself think of that now.

Could I write Ella and call the whole thing off? Tell her that it had been a mistake, sentimental, sincere, but a little childish: a little something to break the boredom of professional life.

She still had time to marry that boy, and we could write to one another from time to time about things that interested us: bibliographies and the like.

I even went so far as to sit at the typewriter and begin a letter. But when my fingers moved, they typed out: "Dearest Ella: It's good to be in love again. I want you so," and so on for three or four more pages.

WHAT ELSE IS WRONG WITH

Television

David Sonstroem

I submit yet another opinion on why television is not better than it is. Television is a wasteland because the fairest flowers that grow there are short-lived and incapable of reproducing their kind.

Under normal conditions, when a writer has an idea for a story, he creates the right characters for the idea, and encourages them to knock about among themselves. Then they play themselves out to the logical, ideally inevitable conclusion that is true to the sum of their characters. Like chemicals, the characters react to one another in the only way possible under the given conditions. And then the story is done.

But hungry television is not done: what about next week? However many millions tune in to *Death of a Salesman,* they tune out when it is over, and there is no second episode dealing with Willy Loman and his miserable family to guarantee their return. Like most worthwhile stories, *Death of a Salesman* is a "Special" by its very nature, to which a sequel would be an abomination. And television cannot afford the luxury of too many "Specials," which are not habit-forming to its viewers.

Television is in a unique predicament. The movies can afford to tell a story and give no thought to a follow-up story, because a film is constantly moving on to new audiences. It can afford simply to repeat itself. Similarly, a play can daily repeat itself, because new audiences continually come to it. But there is no tomorrow for a television program. Unlike the movies and the stage, television cannot ever "clear the theatre" of its most avid viewers, and it cannot afford to irritate these faithful hordes with repetitions. The most that can be hoped for is one re-run of even an outstanding program.

Television meets its peculiar problem of creating carry-over in the face of instantaneous obsolescence in a number of ways:

(1) By offering variety shows, which present no problems with respect to plot. Variety shows tell no stories, or, rather, tell a string of brief stories—a song, a dance, a joke—that are not related one to another. Even if the viewer has "heard this one before," it doesn't matter much, because two minutes' time will bring something new. The good variety show must

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

simply live up to its name. There is no suspense, no carry-over of story from one program to the next, just carry-over of character. In the midst of all the change, the producer must hope that the MC, or perhaps a reappearing comedian or band-leader, will have a personality powerful enough to draw the viewer back in a week. But then the MC does not really have to display cleverness or be a talented actor. It is enough that he make friends and be durably charming. The device of employing a personable "Host" to provide continuity to otherwise unrelated material has worked with middling success even for dramatic shows. Alfred Hitchcock is the most successful example of such an expedient.

(2) By presenting sports events, which are infinitely repeatable because, even though the "cast" and basic conflict are repeatedly reproduced, the action and outcome are ever fresh and different, and the events are determined largely by caprice. By blithely violating a basic tenet of good story-telling—that the action and outcome are inevitable once the characters and conflict have been established—sports events serve as a bottomless well of repeatable "stories" for television. And they have the additional virtue of introducing "heroes" whom viewers remember from one contest to the next, and look forward to seeing again.

(3) Finally, and most commonly, by presenting a series of programs that introduce each week many of the same characters, but in different episodes. Such a procedure is doubly advantageous to television-as-industry: the viewer is held for the course of the program by the unfolding story (it is much easier to tune out a variety show than a drama), and he is coaxed by the prospect of familiar faces to tune in same time same station. It is this type of program that makes addicts of viewers.

And therefore television-as-dramatic-medium is pinched into a difficult corner. How can a handful of characters be pranked out in an infinity of inevitable episodes? Something must give. Characterization or story will almost necessarily receive shoddy treatment. Meaningful relationship between character and plot will almost cease to exist, as unique dramatic personalities are rendered into interchangeable parts that can accomodate themselves easily to any situation; and thoughtful, custom-made plots are altered to suit the character-ciphers that television requires.

Of course there have been strings of episodes that have constituted entirely successful stories, and television has learned something from them. Two reasons that help to explain the success of *Don Quixote*—perhaps the most successful of all episodic stories—are that the locale changes from episode to episode, and that the characters constantly develop. The changes permit the same old characters to experience new adventures that are nevertheless honest—true to the sum of characters and circumstances.

Actually, TV writers have learned to shift a little within the straits of the indefinitely episodic plot. All the crime and spy programs owe much to the fact that the same old faces of good are successively opposed by fresh faces of evil. Thus, in theory at least, an appropriately unique adventure is possible week after week. For the same reasons, the Guest Star is a welcome guest on non-detective shows too. How many times has the Stranger—male by horseback, female by coach—ridden into Frontiersville? The arms widest in greeting are those of the TV writer himself. Another common expedient is to shift the setting from program to program. Even with the same played-out cast, a new ambience can often bring about a fresh encounter. At very least, a change in props can disguise the fact that the half-baked story being dished out is last week's warmed over.

But no number of ingenious expedients can really offset the basic predicament, and we viewers can expect nothing other than characterless characters playing out indistinguishable episode after episode—beads on the network's rosary as it prays interminably for our weekly return. Is there no hope for the regular appearance of televised stories of true integrity, with beginnings, middles, and merciful ends?

To my mind, the only possible way off the treadmill—short of a governmentally owned network, which could afford to ignore ratings—is the establishment of a popular repertory group. Each week the same actors would appear, but they would play entirely different roles in entirely different situations. The familiar faces would draw the viewers back from week to week, and the superior, more truly various stories would enthrall them more effectively than ever during the programs themselves. To avoid such failures as that of the Richard Boone productions, only actors of proven popularity would be used, and, at least initially, nothing overtly high-brow would be attempted. A point could be made of spectacular switches of role—hero to villain, young thing to old hag—which even the most Neanderthal viewer can appreciate.

Of course the actors would really have to know how to act, but that is a healthy stricture. And of course some habits of production and viewing would have to be altered. For example, the viewer would have to learn to recognize and appreciate, to some extent, the actor behind the character, and the acting behind the illusion of real life. But these, too, are healthy adjustments, and the television industry has already demonstrated its ability to mold men's minds in far more drastic and pernicious ways than this proposal requires. It is worth a try. Not only for the sake of the story, which will be released from episodic concatenations—veritable chains in which television has bound it. Not only for the sake of the viewer, who stands only to benefit from a richer and more varied fare. But even for the sake of the television industry, which (we must hope) cannot afford forever to insult the intelligence and taste of all but that army of autistic and addicted unfortunates for whose creation is is largely responsible.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON THE NECESSITY FOR HOLLYWOOD

Allan Jay Wagenheim

We intellectuals (I immodestly include myself among you) habitually and predictably scoff at Hollywood and its famous product. So partly out of pity for the cultural and intellectual underdog, I am going to speak out, when it would have been much easier to remain silent.

I speak out on the necessity for Hollywood, a necessity which I discovered—or which was disclosed to me—quite unexpectedly one evening as I sat in the hushed darkness of the only movie theatre in this college town and watched Richard Burton portraying The Spy in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. The beginning of the film was rather a shock because you are conditioned, in these times, to the James Bond-Our Man Flint-Mat Helm sort of thing, but you see instead of all the garish color (that will appear as blood in several scenes) just black and white, and the music is muted, and oh-so-sad. The credits stencil the screen as soberly as the entries in a bookkeeper's ledger, but the music, which you suspect was stolen from a melancholic and introspective Chopin nocturne, dominates the scene and creates the mood. There is Richard Burton, looking as dour as a university English instructor after he has learned that he will not receive tenure, walking through the chill and somber night. He is waiting for his man to cross from the East zone to the West with forged passport. The man appears at the East gate. He rides through on his bicycle. The alarm suddenly goes off and the man is shot—dead. Failure. The Spy is quietly crushed.

And one hundred and fifty people, sitting expectantly in the dark with half a theatre ticket in their pockets and popcorn on their laps, are dejected. This sort of thing would never happen in a James Bond. Oh, things don't always run smoothly for Bond. He has his ups and downs. But the downs are temporary, just inconveniences, interruptions on his upward climb to more sexual and sadistic pleasure. The bumps, the bruises, the detours even make the final triumph sweeter. Everyone knows the story, but what satisfaction in seeing it enacted again!

Not so with *The Spy*. One disaster merely leads to another. And the final misfortune is inexcusable—he dies. First the girl is shot going over the wall. Then he goes back for her, and he is shot. This, you see, is the catastrophic conclusion of what should have been the great moment of the film, the narrow-escape-that-succeeds. Their mission completed, they have slipped away from their captors and from inevitable extinction, and they are being guided back to the safety of the free world. This is myth: humanity escaping terror, destruction, death. The audience sits there—gum, popcorn, candy immobilized in their mouths—waiting to be saved once again. And they die.

It is like serving rotten meat to a hungry man who has been expecting steak.

As The Spy slumps lifeless to the ground and the melancholy music fills the desolate scene once again, I not only feel cheated but burdened by the disappointment of all the people in the theatre. The myth has been denied, the ritual ignored. It is as though we have all gone to church and the minister or the priest has just passed the collection plate, made a few terse remarks about Sunday Christians, and said, "The hell with the ritual. We all know it's a lot of bunk. Now go home." That might have gone over as a sick joke back in the days of Cotton Mather; but today with all this talk about God being dead, and people quite uncertain and shakey, it isn't humorous or dramatic or attention-getting. It's a blow.

And there we are, struck to the solar plexus. That sweet girl. Young, naive, misguided (a communist), but so full of the juice of life and ready to give more of that free love to The Spy. And he could have used it. He was fed up with the British Secret Service, fed up with spying, fed up with the world; and he needed every bit of love she had to give. They could have done a lot for each other—and what a marvelous way for East and West to reach an understanding. That was what we all needed. Not this, these two lifeless bodies to be cremated at the earliest possible moment.

That was half of the experience that led to my appreciation of Hollywood. The second half occurred

ESCALATION HYMN

(to the tune of "Jacob's Ladder")

We are climbing Johnson's ladder.
Daily we are getting madder,
Swearing on the Great Gall Bladder,
Soldiers of the Peace Offensive.

Every round goes higher, higher.
Each bomb blasts them higher, higher.
H-bombs would lift them to the highest,
Soldiers of the Peace Offensive.

VC, why not love our Johnson?
All the poor folks love our Johnson.
Commies cast their votes for Johnson,
Soldiers of the Peace Offensive.

If we love him, let us serve him.
CO's, marchers, Morse unnerve him.
Let our full consensus serve him,
Soldiers of the Peace Offensive.

We are climbing higher, higher.
Casualties are higher, higher.
Kill and die in Johnson's fire,
Soldiers of the Peace Offensive.

Morgan Gibson

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quite miraculously when I remembered just a fragment of an article that I had read in some magazine recently while sitting in someone's waiting room. The subject was sleep and I recalled vividly a statement about dreams. Some human guinea pig had been constantly awakened whenever he started to dream (somehow those scientists knew when he was about to dream), and he did no dreaming for some time. The significant point about the experiment is that when the subject was finally allowed to dream again, he spent much more time dreaming than he had done before the experiment. He was making up for lost dreams! The implication, of course, is that we have the need to do a certain amount of dreaming; and that is an idea which opens fascinating doors to further speculation, theory, experimentation.

My own theory is that we do a great deal of dreaming on several levels: during sleep, in revery, and in acutely conscious states which may be solitary (such as reading a novel) or in community with others, (as in watching television or a movie). Man not only spends a great deal of time escaping from reality; he actually conceals and denies reality when he appears to be most staunchly facing it, right on the firing line. A long succession of psychiatrists and psychologists, going back to Freud, has revealed the extent to which we rationalize, tell unconscious lies, distort, "forget"—all for the purpose of making reality and truth more pleasant and manageable. There is overwhelming evidence, then, that man—at least modern man—is an irrational escapist who needs to delude and be deluded.

Now, there is a great deal of criticism of this sort of thing. We are frequently exhorted to be forthright and honest, to face facts and realities, to look life in the eye and grapple with it like men. Well, that is all right for politicians and social planners and all those pragmatic men who professionally blunder on, making the world worse for democracy. But as for the millions who hopefully push their dollar bills through the cashier's window in front of the theatre—what they need is reassurance that life is not really so grim, so dull, so fundamentally pointless. What they need is a good dose of joy, of hero-and-gal in bright color, lots of myth that turns out right.

And that is where Hollyood has succeeded better than any other location on earth. It is a success story so well known that I don't have to review it here. A success well deserved, too. Hollywood has manufactured, packaged and distributed one of the most valuable substances known to modern man—a medicine, an antidote for reality poisoning. I can imagine that literally millions of people have been saved from madness or suicide, or from simply running amok, because of the Hollywood motion picture, that great window to paradise.

I am even willing to bet that you, you intellectual, have on occasion put down your Kafka or your Faulkner (in response to a peculiar and alarming impulse), gone to the local picture show—and had a marvelous treat. Although you felt obligated, on the way out, to tear the picture apart.

George's Place

James Fatka

George's Recreation Club is on the corner of Fifth and Main. The hotel is directly across the street. And the city park with its small bandstand sits opposite both. You pass the park and the hotel on your way to George's. On summer nights after work there was nothing to do. The movie theatre was open on Fridays and Sundays only. The town softball team played on Saturdays only. So we went to George's.

George's is a good pool hall. There are eight straight pool tables, one snooker table, and one billard table. There are benches on both sides of the tables, but they are set far enough back from the tables so that they never interfere with play. One dusty clock is mounted on the rear wall, urging pool hall patrons to "Drink Grain Belt Beer." The spittoons are cleaned by new tobacco spittle. The john is in the back. Its walls are covered with the usual dirty words. But a sign is mounted above the toilet, "In case of air raid, jump in here. It hasn't been hit yet." There is a small bar at the front of the building. George loafs there selling his beer and occasionally drinking a beer himself. There is a sign on the door, "Positively NO Minors, by order of the City Council." We couldn't drink; no one wanted to drink anyway. We came to shoot pool and talk to the old guys and to meet somebody.

The summer after I graduated from high school there was nothing to do but work. I was thinking about college, about enlisting, about working. But, hell, I didn't know what to do. So I went to the pool hall.

I would walk into George's about 6:30 after supper. "Hi George." "Hiya, kid. Howya doin'." He never remembered our names. He just wanted the money. There was nobody in the place, so I gave George a quarter and walked to one of the straight tables. I had been having trouble getting enough draw on the cue ball so I began practicing. I set four balls on the table and began shooting, trying to get shape on the next ball. I missed the first shot completely. The second shot slammed home. The third hung on the lip of the pocket and finally fell, but I had no shape on the last ball. I missed it. I heard the door open as I racked the balls and looked up, expecting one of the boys. It was a stranger. I began playing again. I heard footsteps and saw the man sit down on the bench drinking a beer. "Okay, let's impress the man," I thought. I fired two balls into the pockets, but became too anxious on the third shot and it rimmed out. I shot two banks and missed both.

The man stirred. "You've got a hitch in your elbow,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

son," he said. He took a long drink of beer. "You have to keep it solid."

"Oh, yeah?" I said. He was about fifty. He wore loose trousers, neatly belted at the waist, and a light blue sportshirt. His shoes were old but polished. His hairline was receding. The eyes were passive but alert.

"Yeah," he said.

"Well, I use a slip stroke," I said.

"Oh," he said. "That's fine. Pretty hard to do, though." He took another swallow. "Thing is, you still got to keep that elbow steady."

"Yeah," I said. "You want to show me?"

"Sure," he said. He walked to the rack and selected a big barreled, small tipped cue. He sighted down it. "Hmph," he said. "Seems pretty straight for this place." He walked to the table and shot. The ball made a mushy plunk in the pocket. He ran four more balls, each with the same deft slip stroke. He looked up. "Sorry, don't mean to be playin' on your time," he said. He paused. "See what I mean, though? You got to hold the elbow steady." He poised over the cue ball. The fingers of his left hand held the cue lightly but firmly. His right arm moved the cue back and forth, sighting. It paused slightly at the rear of the backstroke, then shot forward smoothly. The ball fell and the cue ball rolled to perfect position for his next shot. "See?" he asked and smiled. "Concentrate on the elbow."

I nodded and walked to the table. He sat down and sipped his beer. I concentrated. The first shot missed, but I made the next two. He nodded, "That's better."

The front door opened, and Jaybird walked in. "Hiya, Sonny," he yelled. "Still think you can play this game? How 'bout half a rock a ball?"

"No thanks, man. Just here to practice," I said. I didn't like Jaybird. He shot his mouth off too much. And he was always talking about how goddam good he was at pool. And he was good. He could beat anybody in that town. Occasionally he shot one-handed and still won. He was good.

More of the boys came in and we started a game of rotation. A snooker game was going in the front, and the old men were filtering in. The stranger sat on the bench, drinking beer, and watching our game. Jaybird won several times, once running the table after his break shot had dropped three balls. I won once, concentrating on my elbow, after the Jaybird had gotten careless. I sat down beside the man. "Thanks," I said. "That helped me."

"Glad I could help," he said. He seemed slightly drunk.

"Where you from?" I asked.

"Oh, nowhere in particular. Chicago, now."

"My name's Sammy," I said and offered my hand.

"Mine's Alf," he said and we shook hands. "That boy's pretty good, isn't he," he said, pointing at Jaybird.

"Yeah," I said. "Best in this town." I said it perhaps a little too proudly. I couldn't like the Jaybird, but, by God, he was the best. And he was ours.

"Oh, is he," Alf said. He walked to the bar and bought another beer. "Well, isn't that something?"

"Hey, Sammy," Jaybird yelled. "You gonna shoot, shit, or get off the pot?" I went back to the game. We played for another hour, and Alf just sat drinking and watching. Every table was in use. Jaybird was squawking louder with every shot. He was calling crazy banks and kiss shots and making them and getting cockier with every stroke of the cue.

We had started playing a nickel a ball, and Jaybird ran the rack and collected 75 cents from everybody. "Gentlemen," he said, "leave us face it. You are not ready to play in my league." He sauntered toward me, hitching his jeans up on his hips. "Come on, Sammy," he said. "None of these guys can beat me. Hows 'bout you'n me playing a little quarter a ball. You were in here early practicin'."

"No thanks, pops," I said. "Too steep for me."

"I'd like to play a little," Alf said. Jaybird looked at him, then down at the beer bottles beside him.

"Okay, man," he said. "How much?"

"Oh, I don't know," Alf said, and I thought I heard fear in his voice. "I don't usually play for money."

"Ah, come on, man," Jaybird said. "No money, no excitement. How 'bout quarter a ball?"

"All right," Alf said. He bought another beer. "May I break?" he asked.

"Sure, man." Jaybird said. He smiled at his buddies on the bench. They smiled back.

"Alf miscued on his break shot and the cue ball caromed into a bocket.

"Gee, tough luck, pops," Jaybird said. He ran six balls but lost his shape and missed. "Shit," he said and dropped his cue to the floor.

"That's what bends cues, son," Alf said.

"Shut the hell up and shoot," Jaybird said. Alf shot and made a ball. But there was something different. He wasn't shooting with a slip stroke, and his elbow was hitching in the back swing. The stroke was no longer smooth, but a jerking stabbing motion. Then I remembered all the beer. Alf missed, and the Jaybird ran the table. "That will cost you three dollah and 50 centavos," he said. The boys on the bench laughed. George and the old men smiled. " 'Fraid you can't beat our boy, mister," George said.

"Sure you can, can't you, old man?" Jaybird said. "You just had a bad game." The boys and the old men laughed

"Well," Alf said, "rotation never really has been my game. Lotta luck in it."

"Oh," said Jaybird, "Well now, what 'li'l ol' game you gonna beat me at."

"Well, I don't know that I can beat you," Alf said. "But how about call shot?"

"Rack 'em," Jaybird said. Alf racked and went to the bar. He was drinking bourbon now.

They played four racks. Alf was still hitching his elbow, but enough balls were falling so that he was staying even. They were playing for a dollar a ball. Everyone else had quit playing and was watching. In the fifth rack, Jaybird was on a run and Alf sat down beside me. His eyes were watery.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Okay," he said. "Why?"

"Well, you've had quite a little to drink."

"Yeah, I guess so," he said.

"You're hitching your elbow," I said.

"Um hum," he said.

Jaybird missed and threw his cue. It bounced off the wall grazing Alf's shoulder.

"Watch that stuff!" George yelled from the door.

"Aw shut the shit up," Jaybird yelled, "You're gettin' paid for the goddam game." George sat down and pulled a beer out.

"You might hurt somebody that way, son," Alf said.

Jaybird was startled. He looked at Alf. "Well you drunken old sonufabitch," he said. You come in here and tell *me* how to play this goddam game?"

"I'm just saying some one could get hurt," Alf said.

"Screw you," somebody yelled and somebody else said, "Talk with your cue, old man."

Alf looked at the old men. One spit. Another looked away. One walked to the john. The others watched him. He smiled shortly. "How much money you got, punk?" he said looking at Jaybird.

"What the hell's it to ya?"

"I'll play you for all the money you got," Alf said. His eyes were fixed on Jaybird. They no longer looked watery.

Jaybird leaned against the table. "Well, counting the money I took off you, I got about thirty bucks." Everyone laughed.

"Small time," Alf said. "Get some real money."

Jaybird snorted. His buddies snorted. The old men smiled. "I don't need no money f' Chrissakes," he said. "You're gonna need it to pay off." Everyone laughed.

Alf smiled. "I'm not playing anyone who can't afford the price."

The pool hall waited. Jaybird stared. "Well I'll be goddammed." he said. The boys shifted on the benches and waited. The old men watched Jaybird. He looked at his cue. He walked over to his buddies. He said something, and they pulled their wallets out. He counted the money and looked at Alf. "There's a hunnerd bucks, sonufabitch. Is that enough?"

"Well," Alf said, "I was hoping for a little more."

George's laugh broke the silence. "Here, kid," he said. "I'll back ya."

"How much?" Alf asked.

"Another hunnerd."

Jaybird looked at Alf. "That good enough for ya, sonufabitch?"

"Yes." Alf said. "We'll shoot for break." Alf settled over the cue ball. He sighted. His arm moved smoothly. At the rear of the stroke it hesitated, then sent the ball smoothly down the table. It hit the cushion and rolled slowly back. It nestled against the cushion. Jaybird shot too softly and had to break. The break shot left one ball out from the rack.

"Punk," Alf said. "You called me a son of a bitch three times tonight. I don't like it. I'll play you one game of fifty balls for all the money. Watch me. Maybe you'll learn something."

He leaned over the table, cue held lightly between the fingers of the left hand. He moved the cue, hesitating, then sending the cue ball hard and fast, slamming the ball home and breaking the rack. "Just watch, son." He moved around the table, the slip stroke deft and firm. Every shot made a soft plunk in a pocket and the cue ball rolled to perfect shape. It was as if he had forgotten where he was. He seemed detached from his surroundings, concentrating on the table, never speaking, never drinking, pausing only while the balls were reracked. Halfway through the fourth rack he stopped and looked at Jaybird. "How many balls do I need?" he asked.

Jaybird hesitated and said, "Fifteen."

Alf stared at him. "Now you've lied to me, son. I need eight balls." He frowned. He ran eight balls. He walked to the bar. "I'll take my money, please," he said. George put it on the counter. Alf took the money and walked across the street to the hotel.

The old men and boys looked at Jaybird. "A goddam hustler," he said. "A goddam hustler." He waited. The boys moved on the benches. "Come on," he said. "We're gittin' our money back." The boys sat. "Come on, goddamit." They followed him to the door.

"Just a goddam minute!" I said. "He beat you fair."

"He's a goddam hustler," Jaybird said. And the others nodded agreement.

"Tell me you weren't hustling him," I said.

The others looked at Jaybird. "Aw screw ya," he said, and they walked toward the hotel. I walked after them.

They went to the desk and got his room number. I followed them up the stairs.

Jaybird slammed the door open and they all walked in. Alf was drinking bourbon. "Gimme my money," Jaybird said .

"No," Alf said.

Jaybird shut the door. "Gimme the money, or you're gonna git the hell kicked outa ya."

"No, I won't son," Alf said. He smiled. "Besides, you're not really interested in the money." He poured another drink. He looked at all of them. I stood apart. "What you're after, I can't give you. You're after what you tried to take from me." He drank and his eyes were watery again. "I won't fight you, and you can't have your money. Now get out of here, you, bastards." He pronounced the word slowly, emphatically.

I opened the door and they walked out. Jaybird looked at Alf. "Nobody's gonna let you get away with this, old man. You better get the hell outa town." He left. I said, "Good night, Alf." "Good night, Sammy," he said.

And Jaybird was right in a way. Alf stuck around town for a couple of weeks. No one would speak to him, and George wouldn't let him in the pool hall. I saw him walking in the park occasionally. We talked about the weather and what a nice summer we were having. Then I didn't see him any more. The hotel said he had checked out. A little later I found a job in another town.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Williamsburg

Gloria Hackel

"You should have seen Williamsburg in the old days," Ellie's father always said to her, "—used to be the finest neighborhood in Brooklyn." And he would lean back in his black leather chair and gaze out of the long narrow parlor floor windows. All the years she was growing up, Ellie sat at her father's feet on the little needlepoint footstool and listened to the stories he told about her grandparents who had come to Williamsburg just after the Civil War when street after street of brownstones, each with its own distinctive wrought-iron trim, its etched glass front doors, its carved stone lintels, rose up like platoons of militia on the Williamsburg streets. "Williamsburg will come back. You wait and see. People will soon find out those little wooden houses they're buying in Midwood and Flatbush won't last—not like these brownstones," and his hand, small and white, the hand of a man who had always lived like a gentleman, reached out to caress the ivory woodwork.

She grew up during the 1930's, when new people came to Williamsburg, families with straggly bits of furniture, and brawling screeching children who played outside all day with rusty bicycles and broken baby carriages. But to her, her father, with his gray satin tie, his intricately-worked diamond stickpin, his rimless pince-nez, his waxed blonde mustache was still a part of the old Williamsburg he talked about. He was another Woodrow Wilson, she thought afterwards, fine-boned, sensitive, yet with all the passionate stubbornness of a man to whom compromise meant defeat. When most of his old neighbors had died or moved away, he mortgaged everything he owned just to save his house. "Renkens have been in Williamsburg for sixty years.—and I won't be the one to leave!"

Ellie had grown up, playing alone in her backyard, or in the basement under the watchful eye of Gracie Moran. Ellie's mother had died two months after she was born, and the Irishwoman was not only cook and housekeeper, but nursemaid as well. When she was six years old, it was Gracie who made her go to school. She went grudgingly, hating it, hating to leave the brownstone for the dusty cramped little schoolhouse on Wilson Street, where the children were strange and unfriendly, and she was the only one who wore starched white linen dresses and white shoes and socks. When she complained to her father, he said, "Don't worry, Ellie dear. These children are not your kind. Soon we'll have a better class of people coming back to Williamsburg. You'll see."

Gradually, though, she came to accept school, and the other children. And when she was thirteen, one of the girls invited her to a party.

"But who will take you?" her father said when she told him, "—and who will bring you home?" He was confined to the house now. Asthma, a family inheritance, had forced him to give up his post at the bank, and the tiny annuity Ellie's grandmother had left was just enough for them to live on.

"She said her father would bring me home."

"But I don't know the man, Ellie. I don't even know what kind of people they are."

"She says . . ."

"Listen to me," and he fixed his light gray eyes on her face. "I can't let you go—you're a young lady now, Ellie, not a little girl any more. I have no one but you—" Then his voice rose. "By God, those City Hall politicians have been sending God knows what kind into Williamsburg! Maybe next year the decent people will use their heads and we'll get a change of administration! Then something will be done!"

Not many girls asked her to parties after that, and she told herself she was glad. It was too hard to refuse, and to explain why. She stayed home in the evenings and listened to the little radio in her bedroom. Everyone in school was talking about the approaching war in Europe, and though she was as anxious as anyone for news, she didn't think about the soldiers or the fighting. She would lie on her bed, stretched out full-length, and think about after the war, when Williamsburg would change. Surely, surely, Williamsburg would change after the war!

The war came and passed. She finished high school. She wanted to look for a job, but her father protested, saying that Renken women never worked, and his mother would turn over in her grave if she knew that he had let Ellie work in some dirty office somewhere. So she stayed home and helped him sort and catalogue the old family papers. He had five trunks in the cellar —dampness had got to three of them—and he wanted to write a family history.

The year she turned twenty, there was a week of unusually heavy autumn rains, and leaves from the tree in the backyard kept coming down and covering the open drain outside the basement door. Water came into the kitchen, and for the first time in all the years, Gracie asked for help with the mopping up. She was nearly sixty-eight, and though she would never admit it, she didn't see or hear too well any more. Ellie

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worked the pail and mop, while Gracie did the wringing out; but while they were working, Gracie complained of feeling dizzy.

"Lie down for a little while," Ellie said. "I'll finish up."

Ten minutes later, when Ellie went to look for her, Gracie was on the little cretonne-covered daybed in the basement front room, lying down, with her hands at her sides.

"Did you hang up the wet rags?" Gracie asked, opening her eyes as Ellie came in.

Ellie nodded.

"See you let them dry properly," Gracie said. "I won't be here any more to tell you what to do." And that was all.

"I guess we'll have to get someone to do Gracie's work," her father said when Ellie came back from the funeral. He was in his leather chair, his hands clasping and unclasping the armrests. Ellie thought that he looked as tired, as worn, as if he had gone to the cemetery with her. He never went out any more. He spent his days in the parlor, reading and rereading the old books and letters.

"I don't want you doing heavy work—"

"I don't mind," she said soothingly. "Anyway, Gracie wouldn't want a stranger in her kitchen."

The care of the house came easily to Ellie, and it was a welcome relief to the close paper work she had been accustomed to doing in the parlor. Sometimes as she cleaned the rooms, and swept the backyard leaves together, she remembered Gracie telling her about her brothers and sisters in Ireland and how she had been the only one to come to America. "They had no guts!" Gracie said succinctly. "You need guts to stay alive in this world."

A month later, while she was cleaning out the drawers of Gracie's old dresser, she came upon a faded remnant of a letter to Gracie's sister in Cobh. ". . . and the poor lass is shut tight in this mausoleum of a house, while the whole place 'moulders' around her . . . and he's 'mouldering,' too, poor man. . . ."

That afternoon, sitting with her father in the parlor, she felt as though she couldn't breathe. She got up and went to the parlor window. The lace curtains, remnants of her grandmother's trousseau, were threadbare and yellowed, and as she pulled them aside, a little of the edging tore. "I'm going to take a walk," she said.

"It's too late." Her father looked up from his notebook. "You can't walk now."

"I—I must get out." Her lips were compressed, and her eyes, gray, myopic, set far apart on her thin little face, seemed to take in a wider vision than just the houses across the way. "I —don't get out enough."

"You can't go out now —not when it's so late! Last week, I read in the paper where they attacked some woman down near the bridge. Stole her purse, beat her up! God knows what else!"

She turned around to face him. "I don't know why —but I must go out!" she cried.

"Ellie, Ellie —can't you see? This whole neighborhood's gone to the wall!" he said despairingly. "Look at the Cole place across the street —all boarded up. And the Seelig place next to it —windows broken. My God, the old Williamsburg is dying—" and he held out his hand, no longer white, scored by the purplish veins that stood out like bas-relief from the parchment skin.

She shivered, and in that moment, her life seemed to lie somewhere between them, suspended, waiting, like the old Williamsburg. Yet she was not conscious of the waiting —only of a fear that her father would say something, or do something to destroy the grandeur of that infinitely graceful image of him that she kept intact within herself.

His mind went six months later, gradually, imperceptibly at first. The short absent silences grew longer, the dazed bewilderment lasted for hours at a stretch. In the mornings she fed and cleaned him; at night, she took him up to bed. But, during the afternoons, while he napped, or sat in his black leather chair, staring out of the window, she walked through the Williamsburg streets: down Wythe Avenue, along Hewes or Rodney Street, over to Bedford and back again to the fountain where Bedford, Lee and Division Avenues all met. Sometimes she turned down Roebling Street to Broadway and along to Marcy Avenue and the library; others, she simply stopped at the Bridge Plaza and sat on a stone bench, looking at the statue of Washington. Every now and then, while she walked, she took off her glasses to see—actually see—Williamsburg. But her myopia always turned everything into a grayish blur. The brownstones disappeared, and the cracked slate sidewalks, and she might as well have been walking through the halls of Valhalla.

The week after her father died, she didn't leave the house. Then, the old restlessness came on her again, and she began to walk in the afternoons.

Under the Williamsburg Bridge was a small playground, built during the 1930's for the children of Williamsburg who had no other place but sidewalks and gutters for their games. Only this playground was too far from the brownstones, and too near to the factories and the river, and no one used it except an occasional factory worker who sat on a bench to eat his lunch in the open air, instead of inside one of the tiny luncheonettes nearby.

Ellie had never known about the playground and when she came on it by chance on a late October afternoon, she looked around, unbelieving. The iron fence, the trees in the little cobble-stone squares, the wooden benches, the cement walk, gave it the look of a tiny park. She sat down on one of the benches and she thought that the shadows made by the huge bridge pylons overhead made it seem unreal, like a place she might have seen in a dream. And she felt a tiny stirring. Williamsburg was changing. This playground was a change, a beginning.

Eight days later, she saw the children. She had gone to the playground every day, hoping, but she had seen no one except an old woman wheeling a baby carriage in the opposite direction as she came along.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When she was half a block away, she saw them: the girl and the two little boys. The girl was about seven or eight, thin, pale, with long black pigtails that stuck out from a little red beret. She held a roly-poly boy of two in one of the baby swings, pushing him gently back and forth, without ever letting go of his coat. The other boy was as thin as the girl, but a year or two younger, and he climbed to the top of the sliding pond and came down with the utmost care, letting the soles of his worn sneakers drag along the sides. After a couple of minutes, the girl lifted the little boy out of the swings, and plumped him down on the seesaw, climbing up behind him while the other boy struggled to balance them and get on himself. They teetered up and down a few times, until the girl gave a signal. The older boy got off and braced the plank again for the girl and the baby. The three of them stood together for a moment, and then, without a word, the girl thrust the baby at the older boy, and ran to the larger swings.

Standing on the green wooden seat, she began to pump with her whole body, up and down, quickly, quickly, until the swing, rising higher and higher, was nearly parallel to the ground. Ellie, watching, trembled at the reckless ease with which the girl slipped into the seat, and how lightly she held the metal chains, even while the swing was at its peak. For a little while, the girl luxuriated in the freedom of the full swing, but then, using her legs as brakes, she slowed it down, until it faltered and stopped. While the girl was swinging the little boy screamed and struggled and the other boy only held him with the greatest difficulty. But, as the girl leaped off, she held out her arms and he ran to her, with the older boy following more slowly. A moment later, all three were gone.

That night, Ellie lived it through again, the walk along Broadway through the striated shadows of the elevated subway, the coming to the playground, and the finding of the children. She had longed to ask the girl how it was up there in flight, whether it was as wild, as free, as glorious as it seemed from the benches below. The boldness, the unhesitating surge of the swing, had seemed magnificent to her. But when the children passed her going out, she hadn't known what to say.

Later, in the small hours of the morning, the empty playground, the fading afternoon daylight, the pale intent faces of the children, seemed like fragments of a dream. Had she imagined the children? Were they real?

The next afternoon, she went to the playground an hour earlier, hastening through the streets, feeling disappointment like a stitch in her side when she saw that no one was there. She sat on a bench and waited, staring down the street until her eyeballs ached; and it was only as she was ready to leave, that the children came again. While Ellie sat, transfixed, not daring to move, there was the swinging of the little boy, the timid up-and-down of the seesaw, and, as the climax, the wild graceful soaring flight of the girl.

After that Ellie went to the playground every day. When the children came, she felt warm and excited; when they didn't, it was as though the insistent wind from the river had permanently chilled her body. Where the children came from, what their names were, she didn't know or care. She was afraid to speak to them, afraid that if she did speak they might vanish and leave her with nothing.

A week after she had first seen them, the girl and the tiny boy came alone. At first, Ellie thought that the older boy would be along in a moment, but the look on the girl's face, the half-hearted way she swung the little boy, told Ellie that the other boy wasn't coming at all.

After the girl took him from the swing, her eyes went to the other, larger swings and Ellie immediately understood that furtive unhappy look. She got to her feet, unsteadily, almost unaware that she was standing.

"I —I'll hold the boy," and her voice was strange and hoarse.

The girl turned around. "He's strong," she said gravely, staring at Ellie with black unfathomable eyes. "He always wants to come with me."

"I'll hold him," said Ellie again, although the effort of speaking seemed to drain her strength. "You go on."

Like a small darting animal, the girl thrust the little boy at Ellie, and ran to the swings. Up she went, pumping madly, while Ellie tried to hold the squirming, crying boy in her arms. At last she managed to circle his plump waist and interlock her fingers around him. "She'll be down in a minute," she murmured, without thinking, her eyes on the girl who was so high that she seemed to be floating free of the ground. The boy stopped crying, and, as Ellie looked down, he put out a tiny hand to touch her chin.

That night Ellie couldn't sleep, still feeling those hesitant fingers on her face. The next day she went to the playground before lunch, but though she stayed until long after the sun disappeared, no one came except a lone squirrel who had lost his way back to the park and had to content himself with the bare pickings on the Williamsburg streets.

Afterward, in the brownstone, with the portraits of her grandparents on the wall, and the yellowing wedding photograph of her mother and father, Ellie told herself that she would never go back to the playground under the bridge, that it was a snare, a delusion, that Williamsburg—the old Williamsburg—had vanished somewhere in the decades that passed, and that there would never be a 'new' Williamsburg. The playground was meaningless, the children, imaginary. She would have to live out her life inside these paper-covered walls, and these high, chalk-white ceilings. Her resolve lasted until the next morning when she went back to the playground.

Two days later, the older boy came alone, and her joy at seeing him was as intense as it had been the first time she had found the children. He came in the late afternoon, and the twilight made his face seem whiter and smaller than before. He went down the sliding pond with his usual caution, and after that he went to the larger swings. He stood up on the wooden

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seat like the girl, but, instead of pumping hard, he swung as though it didn't matter. When he got off, he looked around in a dispirited kind of way, and then, he started to run toward the gate. Ellie, afraid that he would disappear again, called out,

"Boy!"

He stopped and turned around, obviously waiting for her to speak.

At his look, her desperation grew. She hadn't talked to anyone for days, and, in that one instant before the words came, she was afraid that she might have forgotten how to speak, how to say anything except perfunctory words like, "good morning," or "a half-pound of meat, please." Now she had to force her lips to move as though language itself had become strange to her.

"Boy—your sister—where is she?"

"She's sick."

"What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know. Yeah, I do. She had to go to the hospital. She was coughing." He leaned away, and she knew he wanted to leave. Another time, she would have let him go immediately, but now she was compelled to keep him a little longer.

"When is she coming back?"

"I don't know." He put his hands in his pockets. "She says when she comes back, you can hold my brother again. She says he likes you better." Then he ran off, fleetly, his gray wool jacket merging with the shadows of the coming night.

Ellie walked back to the brownstone, and her eyes behind their thick lenses fixed themselves on a place beyond the horizon. Overhead, the sky sent down a flurry of snowflakes, a warning of more to come, but she didn't see them. She felt no wind, no chill from the river, only a hunger as though she was a shell waiting to be filled.

That night the snow came, and it fell steadily for the next three days and nights. In the early afternoon of the fourth day, it stopped, and the Williamsburg milkman, who had delivered milk to her for twenty years, pushed his way through to the basement door.

"It's pretty bad out." His coat was streaked with white, and only the tops of his rubber boots were showing.

"Can you walk?" she asked urgently.

"Don't go out if you don't have to. Some places the drifts are higher'n my shoulders. Boy, they don't send snow shovels to Williamsburg any more. Too busy with them in New York."

"I must go out," Ellie said more to herself than to him.

"Lookee—only last night, over at the hospital, they were bringing in women and children near blue with the cold. They go out half-dressed, and before you know it, it starts snowing again. You'd think this was the North Pole the way it's been going on."

Ellie nodded absently. The past three days she had stayed at the basement windows, looking out through the wrought-iron bars. The snow had made the street strange, and only the top of the areaway railing, and the lamp post still showed through.

After the milkman had gone, she went into the parlor, to the photograph. "I —must go," she said helplessly.

Outside the cold air clawed at her face, but she went forth bravely, her head swaddled in a long woolen scarf, her black coat buttoned up to the neck. Her father's heavy leather gloves were on her hands, and, in her pocketbook, she carried a package of lollipops and a small box of crackers. They had been there ever since the snow began, and her need to give them was painful and insistent.

Slowly, with much difficulty, falling into drifts and pulling herself out again, she made her way along. White covered the dirty Williamsburg areaways, the rusty iron railings, the battered garbage cans. Everything was white, intensely virginal, and as she walked she blinked her eyes at this vision of Williamsburg reborn.

Falling into a drift at a crosswalk, she lost one of the gloves, and, while she groped for it, her scarf loosened and fell, only to be whipped away by an unexpected gust. She ignored her losses and pushed her way past another and another snowdrift, losing the other glove, too, but not stopping or turning back. A chill wet seeped through her low boots; the coat on her shoulders was weighted with a soggy heaviness. Her hands were numb, her legs ached, but still she went forward.

At last she came to the playground, and the sky, which had been gray all day, seemed to darken. On the benches, the snow was a gentle coverlet for the rude painted planking, and she sat down gratefully. Then, her eyes went to the swings, covered with their own little patches of white, and one swing, the one nearest to her, moved a little, invitingly. And she felt a terrible yearning.

She struggled to her feet. In that one moment of sitting her legs seemed to have turned to ice, and she had to force herself to walk, to inch her way bit by bit. When the effort became too great, she gathered her strength and hurled herself at the swing, catching the chain with her bare hands just as she was about to plunge headlong into the snow. She thrashed about, panting and frantic, until she could draw herself up.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then, because of her bulky coat, it was a few moments more before she was actually sitting down.

She swayed, drunkenly, her head light and strange. The swing moved, a little, back and forth. She swayed again, deliberately this time, and again the swing responded. Again she moved her body, and, as she did so, suddenly it seemed that the stiffness, the numbness, was leaving her. The swing moved faster now, and she was going up with it, higher and higher. She moved her body rhythmically, back and forth. She was a little girl in a red beret, and, as she pumped, her dark plaits stretched out behind her like two pennants.

Snow fell on her glasses, blinding her, but she didn't care. In the rush of air past her ears, she thought she heard someone saying, "It's too late. You can't—" but it might only have been the wind from the river. She shook her head. Nothing mattered to her now but the swing. She was wedded to it, rising, meeting the darkening sky. And as she went up, the heavy shadows of the Williamsburg Bridge, and the white forlorn playground nestling underneath like a forgotten child, gradually faded from her sight.

Contributors

WILLIAM CHILDRESS, born in Hugo, Oklahoma, has published poems and stories in *Poetry, Harper's, Southern Review* and elsewhere. He is the author of *Larry the Hairy Ape* and other songs, and is currently a member of the Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa.

VICTOR CONTOSKI is a frequent contributor to *The North American Review*.

Holder of a Yale B.A., LEONARD CONVERSI is doing graduate work in English literature at Harvard and is at work on "a novel, *All Arabia's Lovers,* . . . the last great theme available to western literature."

Reassigned to Tunis for a normal State Department Foreign Service duty tour on September 1, JEFF CORYDON III is a frequent contributor to *The North American Review*.

ERNEST EARNEST, professor of English at Temple University, is the author of five published books and has had many articles in magazines such as *American Scholar, Saturday Review,* etc. He is Director of the Gladwyne Fire Co.

JAMES FATKA was a June graduate from Cornell College.

(Continued Inside Back Cover)

Books

SEMINAL INTRODUCTION

Urban Blues. Charles Keil. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1966. 231 pp. $4.95.

The publishers of this book call it "controversial," thus doing it a distinct disservice. Controversy in this country today is largely a sham dreamt up by some publicity agent; when the word appears, it is usually safe to say, the controversial matter has died. It involves such charred remains as euthanasia ("if your mother were suffering from incurable c----r . . ."); capital punishment ("how much longer can a civilized society . . .?"); and the Americanism of apple pie. Those who feed on such pablum are liable to a violent seizure of indigestion if they read Mr. Keil's book. Or, to place the disturbance more precisely, their ideas will be thoroughly stirred, mixed, and shaken.

In the opening pages, Mr. Keil aserts that in this country the Negro "struggle is for cultural pluralism," a statement likely to appeal to American broadmindedness. The only trouble is that, a few pages later, he demands that we fish or cut bait. His description of the essential conditions of Negro culture, set down without embarrassment or apology, is unnerving. Unlike the culture of the white middle class, he observes, with its center in marriage, conjugal fidelity, and the family, the culture of the urban, lower-class Negro is determined by a male who often seeks independence and sexual satisfaction outside marrige, however fond he may be of his wife, and by a woman who, though seeking "emotional support" and prizing her children, often indulges in sexual promiscuity, in "casual, semi-professional or professional prostitution."

The conclusion that white do-gooders will draw and have drawn from these observations—the precarious, matriarchal family life of the Negro is a chief cause of the shiftless, irresponsible, insecure Negro male—is one that Mr. Keil has anticipated with great glee, scalpel at the ready. In contrast to the white's condescending picture of the bumbling, incompetent Negro, forever pursuing immediate sensual gratification and unable to grow up or cope with the complexities of the twentieth century, Mr. Keil offers a detailed composite portrait of some Negro culture heroes, the blues singers, who epitomize and express the values, hopes, and aspirations of a great many Negroes. The blues give words to the defeats and triumphs of the Negro; and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the singers themselves—their achievement of success without degrading physical toil, their independence, their charismatic appeal to women, their ability and readiness to spend freely and largely—embody the ideal of Negro masculinity. It is therefore unfair, Mr. Keil concludes, to judge the Negro male by the standards of white society. Even the Negro woman, needing emotional stability and support for her family, at the same time admires the man who takes to the street and wins victories through his verbal, physical, and sexual prowess. These victories, lying outside the organization and sometimes the law, are wrested from an environment which to the white man looks very much like a jungle. But, insists Mr. Keil, they are no less victories for all that and are signs of vitality and strength, not weakness.

These arguments are weighty and impressive. Mr. Keil leaves little doubt in the mind of this reader 1) that there is a genuine Negro culture (not merely, as some whites would have it, a shadowy or spurious subculture); 2) that the blues singer is a central figure in this culture; and 3) that the culture is aesthetically rich and vital. Nevertheless, one may be left with certain questions about the total effect of Negro culture on Negro life.

Is it reasonable to ask whether the culture Mr. Keil describes is adequate to counterbalance the miseries of slum life, or whether a few blues singers and other culture heroes, despite their undoubted success, can provide the example or pattern by which the mass of urban Negroes can significantly ameliorate their lot? Perhaps it is not reasonable to expect social or economic improvements from any culture; and perhaps, in speaking of "miseries," I merely reveal the abysmal ignorance of the white driving through a Negro quarter and noticing only the decaying houses, the shabbiness, the dirt. But what of the Negro stud whose charisma and teeth disappear? What of the Negro hustler who is hustled into prison for long stretches? What of the good-timer whose pleasures are fitful appendices to a constant struggle for the moxie, the wherewithal? And, above all, what of the millions of Negroes who are not studs or hustlers or good-timers but must do whitey's dirty work? Does a Saturday-night visit to the neighborhood blues emporium get them through the week? Mr. Keil does give what might be called encouraging answers to some of the questions: he notes the tendency of blues singers to turn to preaching and the stress in some blues lyrics on Negro solidarity and marital fidelity. But one still wonders whether the idolization of the blues singer as folk hero is not grounded in a vicarious escapism doomed to fail by the harsh realities of slum life and by the conditions of modern society.

Most of the questions above might be subsumed in one: can the Negro culture explored by Mr. Keil continue for long to coexist with a white culture whose emphasis on a rather high standard of material comfort and stability for the many is anathema to Negro standards of independence and of easy or legerdemain success? The question might seem naive, for as Mr. Keil observes, a Negro culture in one form or another has already enjoyed a long history. What would end it? The answer lies generally in the new concern for bringing the Negro into American society and more specifically in two ideas, currently in the talking stage, which may be portents. Daniel Moynihan on more than one occasion and President Johnson in his momentous speech at Howard University are only the most important among many to hit upon the idea that Negro family life must somehow be strengthened. A specific corrective I recently read of proposes that needy families with fathers in residence, so to speak (an obvious glance at Negroes), receive greater financial aid than those which the father has deserted. If the Negro male's desire for independence and the Negro culture arising from it should survive such a blow, I do not doubt that others will follow, for substantial numbers in the white community are growing profoundly upset, right or wrongly, with Negro mores. "The struggle . . . for cultural pluralism" of which Mr. Keil speaks is, I suspect, a rather faint-hearted one for many Americans.

OKAY

Hi, honey,
what's for lunch?

Goose
for lunch
its head

sliced off
neck broken

belly slit
and stuffed
with stale hard bread

for lunch.

THE ASSIGNMENT

A poem
he said
fat and shiny

like a new
fire truck
make me

a poem like that.
So I smiled
I said

all right
you're a
poem like that.

Dave Kelly

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rather, the struggle for many is not to expand but to contract pluralism, to confine it within narrow limits. Though no sane person would wish to cram the throat of an orthodox Jew with pork, plenty of ostensibly sane whites bridle at the Negro's domestic and sexual habits. The more prominent the Negro "question" becomes—and hardly anyone would predict a diminishing prominence—the more uneasy the middle-class white may become at what is revealed to him about the Negro.

This review, already too long, has dealt largely with the introduction to Keil's book, the portion which I happen to find the most seminal and generally provocative. Other readers, however (and I belong also with them), will take great interest in Keil's intelligent guidance through the shoals and into the mainstream of contemporary Negro blues. I wish I had had it a few years ago when I made my only expedition to a Negro blues bar, a place called the Crown Propellor Lounge, at 63rd and Cottage Grove in Chicago. Lured by repeated radio advertisements exhorting me to take my "fellah to the Crown Propellar," I did so—or rather, less sensationally, I took two fellahs and a girl. The evening was a total disappointment to all of us because of our failure to understand the purpose, idiom, and language of the city blues. Had we done the proper homework, which only Keil, so far as I know, provides, we would have had a better time.

Thomas B. Gilmore

THE "NEW MORALITY" IS NOT NEW

Situation Ethics. Joseph Fletcher. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1966, $3.95.

Ever since Bishop Robinson introduced the term "the New Morality" to the general public in his best seller *Honest to God,* the subject of personal morals has suddenly become a topic of widespread interest and debate. And the liveliness of the issue has been enhanced by the fact that its leading exponents are not merely free-thinkers or existentialists but respected advocates of religious ethics. And yet, like its corresponding movement in theology, the New Morality is not restricted to the esoteric arguments of specialists but is spelled out in language easy to understand, and it is illustrated in terms of the actual life situations that any person is apt to encounter.

What makes this lateest statement of the New Morality particularly challenging, is the stature of its proponent, as well as the force of the argument and its presentation at the layman's level. Joseph Fletcher is not a novice with a revolutionary thesis. He is a recognized authority in his field, Professor of Social Ethics at a leading theological seminary, active leader in several organizations, and a widely known lecturer and writer.

The New Morality, of course, is not new, as the author himself acknowledges. It is, rather, a new term for a view of morals that has a long tradition traceable to the ancient Greeks. It has gone under many names — Contextualism, Relativism, Situationism — and recently it has been incorrectly identified with existentialist ethics. But what makes Situation Ethics *new* is that religious ethics has traditionally been legalistic, absolutistic, and authoritarian — all the way from Old Testament times up to the present; whereas empirical and relative forms of ethics have come from outside the religious context — that is to say, from philosophers who have not felt constrained to derive ethics from religious presuppositions. Only in recent times have prominent religious writers advocated a non-absolutist ethic. Many of the giants of contemporary Protestantism — Tillich, Brunner, the Niebuhrs, Bultmann, Temple — are all in one way or another proponents of the New Morality. Among current literature on the subject, however, Fletcher's volume is perhaps the least difficult and most explicit statement of this position.

The major feaures of the New Morality can be found in the author's article in a recent issue of *Commonweal* ("Love is the Only Measure", *Commonweal,* Vol. 83, No. 14, Jan. 14, 1966) where the reader can compare it with a new argument for the "old morality" by Herbert McCabe, O.P. As one might suspect, the impetus for the New Morality comes from the alleged failure of the old. The main contention is that the moral laws of traditional ethics, being abstract, are inapplicable to all the varieties and subtleties of concrete moral situations. For this reason if a precept like "Thou shalt not kill" is taken to be an unconditional moral law, then it simply does not apply to concrete human situations, such as a particular case of self-defense. This is why in practice such moral precepts are adjusted and qualified by casuists and others, so that the moral question shifts from the act of killing to the justification of it under certain circumstances.

But more than this, Fletcher argues that submissiveness to rules and laws inclines toward moral insensitivity — that law takes precedence over spirit, principles become more important than persons, and then men lose sight of the fact that rules are made for men, and not the other way around. This is what can produce the sort of ethical nightmare in which a pregnancy occurring amongst inmates in a mental institution cannot be terminated because of a regulation prohibiting abortion for any reason at all.

The positive side of the argument is in principle quite simple. It states that lawlessness is not the only alternative to a set of fixed moral rules but that only one principle is necessary — *agapeic* love, or loving kindness, and that all other rules, commandments, and precepts, are only guide-lines and general maxims rather than inviolable natural laws or divine decrees. As the author repeatedly emphasizes, no act is intrinsically good or evil. The moral quality of an act is nothing more than the way in which that act expresses love and concern, or fails to do so.

This can be pretty shocking, as Fletcher indicates, for it means that killing a person could be the right thing to do in a certain situation, or that lying might be a good thing under special circumstances, or even that adultery might be a moral obligation in a particular case! This is the reason why some individuals fear the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Morality, for it seems to permit in certain contexts almost any kind of behavior. And this is exactly what the new moralist insists upon. It is the context and the consequences of a given act that determine the moral quality of *that* act.

It is little wonder, then, that the New Morality has been confused with a relaxed attitude toward sexual morals especially, or "loose" morals, or even no morals at all! In his most recent book, *Sin, Sex and Self-Control,* Norman V. Peale blankly asserts that the New Morality reduces to no morality. And it seems that however hard the new moralist tries to detach himself from this distortion, the removal of moral qualities from types of actions results in an exaggerated relativistic ethics from the viewpoint of the traditionalist and absolutist.

But this reaction, an emotional one, is a result and not a criticism of the book. In this reviewer's opinion, Fletcher has done a good job. He has laid out the presuppositions and basic propositions of the new ethics in easy-to-understand terms; he has made the point that even the casuistry of the older morality is a sustained attempt at "turning the law" to fit human needs and circumstances; and he has simplified some hard ethical problems, showing that even the traditional moralist appeals to something other than moral laws when these conflict, as in the case of telling a lie to save a life.

That this book is readable and concise may not be its greatest virtues, but they are among the factors that are likely to make it a best seller. For the time is right for this text. The modern temper is empirical, pragmatic, relative, and person-centered, and these are precisely the presuppositions upon which the author bases his view.

Rudolph C. Muska

A BOMB FOR THE BOURGEOIS

Fertig by Sol Yurick. Trident Press, 1966. 344 pp. $5.95.

Fertig is the most ambitious undertaking of a young novelist whose first work, a suspense novel entitled *The Warriors,* showed early indications of a style and a concept of life which has placed its author in a recent collection of avant-garde writing. It is the story of a "monstrous crime," the calm, deliberate and premeditated murder of seven people associated in one way or another with a large city hospital. And yet, for all of the author's awareness of corruption, among doctors, in hospitals, in law, psychiatry and prisons, for all the critical contrast with Raskolnikov or the existential murderer, Fertig's crime is that of the anarchist and the failure of the novel is the failure of the crime to remain clear of the legal and psychiatric entanglements which eventually make it meaningless.

Harry Fertig loses the child he fathered late in life because of the bureaucratic dehumanization of the society in which he lives. The following year in a single day he murders seven persons associated with the hospital he holds responsible for the "murder" of his child. He waits for the authorities to find him and punish him so that society may recognize the enormity of their sin against him and against all men. In the end he is found legally insane and is put away in an institution where he can be forgotten. The bus makes its way into the asylum from which he must never be freed, "a lush jungle of ice flowers, thick and impenetrable, obscuring your world outside."

The eighth chapter is perhaps the most vital in Yurick's attempt to have this one small man confront the ogre of the society around him. Here, Dr. Heisenberg talks with the captured killer in the hope that he can establish the man's irrational view of society. The psychiatrist tries to prove that Fertig is a paranoid schizophrenic, attempting to "turn the standard ethical forces into demonic agents of evil." Fertig is convinced that he is not insane, that he is not sorry for what he has done and that he would do it again if he had to. Fertig had already rejected the thought of revenge when he decided not to kill those directly responsible for the crime. His thoughts about his crime are contrasted with the psychological evaluation of their irrational character on the part of the psychiatrist. Yet Fertig is often overly rational. "This is the psychiatric ward," he argues. "I'm not suffering from any mental disease. If I'm here it means that what I did is going for nothing." Fertig does not relent for a moment. Man is afraid to do what he would really like to do, he argues. "Your life is over unless you do something about it," he says of the corruption around him. It is easy to remain aloof until the corruption strikes directly at you. And it is a crime that was caused, something malignant caused it, it didn't just happen. "And then one day," says Fertig, "I saw what I had been learning all the time, what I now knew. And I knew that everything was evil, rotten, corrupt from top to bottom —" Fertig's feeling of futility sought some extreme form of expression. What was the good of killing seven people? Fertig replies, "It means something can be done. It's in everyone. Everyone can do something. There are two goods. Love is good. Life is good. What destroys them, what beats them down, what is careless about them is evil."

Dr. Heisenberg's feeling after the interview poses the inevitable contradiction.

> He could see the whole pattern; the inevitable descent from plateau to plateau of adjustment, coping with frustrations: the early compulsions, the stimulus, the breakdown, the delusional paranoia, then visions of grandeur, the rationalization into saviorism, and that final excess, that significant impulse which triggered the holocaust. All that was missing was the final immolation, which a sane society, which a protective and loving society, must never permit if he could help it. It was of such stuff that the great dictators were made . . .; it was of such stuff the Christs, the Buddhas, the Mohammeds were built.
>
> . . . compulsion paranoia delusion grandeur protest savior. . . GOD! And he loved the poor, low, wretched Fertig.

Into this moral dilemma move Fertig's wife Sara; his clever and ambitious lawyer, Roy Bleakie; his employer, Grenoble; judges, policemen, doctors, men of the cloth and all the fragments of the complex society Fertig has chosen to confront. The failure of Fertig is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the failure of the novel. The anarchist act is unlike the act of vengeance, it is unlike the amoral murder of the existential hero or any other murder for that matter. It is the willingness to force an indifferent society to open its eyes. It is like the surrealist who shocks one into looking and listening. It is the bomb thrown into the bourgeois theatre, the striking out against society. A new society can only be built on the ruins of the old one. To kill these men and women who represent the evil that has struck one personally is to say that one counts for something. Frank Harris' anarchist hero in *The Bomb* accepts this function. If a man is meaningless in a society beyond his feeble power, then only the most enormous act can awaken responsibility and announce that we are all sick, that even one man can tell all of society that this is so. Author Sol Yurick chooses to dilute this action first by bringing evidence of the moral weakness of the persons murdered, the adulterous doctor, the homosexual rabbi, the cruel hospital clerk, and secondly by turning what is essentially an ethical question into a legal and sociological one. Fertig has taken up his weapon and said to all around him, "I have been wronged and society is to blame. I can not write letters to the papers or protest by marching in front of the hospital. I must kill these people, regardless of who they are, so that I may say that I am a man, that I am alive, and that all men may see that what I have done is right." Neither the law, nor the psychologist nor the priest nor any of society's many spokesmen have any part in this affair. I do not need to rationalize or justify what I have done. That my action may only disrupt and destroy society is irrelevant. It is the only way in which a meaningful life can come about.

Walter Borenstein

LOVE AND QUESTIONS

Eros and Civilization. Herbert Marcuse. Beacon Press, Boston, 1966. 277 pp. $6.00.

Originally published in 1955, Professor Marcuse's extensive philosophical inquiry into Freud has now been reissued with a new "political preface" by the author. Professor Marcuse finds a great deal wrong with modern life, and his views often make provocative reading. Among them:

—"Poverty and exploitation were products of economic freedom: time and again, people were liberated all over the globe by their lords and masters, and their new liberty turned out to be submission, not to the rule of law but to the rule of the law of the others. What started as subjection by force soon became 'voluntary servitude,' collaboration in reproducing a society which made servitude increasingly rewarding and palatable."

—"The spread of guerilla warfare at the height of the technological century is a symbolic event: the energy of the human body rebels against intolerable oppression and throws itself against the engines of repression."

—"Western civilization has always glorified the hero, the sacrifice of life for the city, the state, the nation; it has rarely asked the question of whether the established city, state, nation were worth the sacrifice."

POTPOURRI

The Pacifist Conscience, Edited and with an introduction by Peter Mayer. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966. 478 pp. $7.95.

Peter Mayer has assembled in this volume the vast majority of short items or excerpts which are truly pertinent to an understanding of those individuals throughout history who have believed that violence is wrong. This is an impressive collection of intellect and of ideas. The bibliography alone is worth the price of the volume. If you plan to buy only one book this year, buy *The Pacifist Conscience.* Then study it.

Radicalism in America; Great Rebels and Causes for Which They Fought from 1620 to the Present, Thomas Y. Crowell, New York, 1966. 372 pp. $8.95.

The title alone suggests the impossibility of writing a brief review of this large volume because the span of time incorporates at least twenty major groups demanding attention and dozens of lesser ones. As an introduction, *Radicalism in America* serves admirably with but one obvious fault: an interpretation which tends to ignore radicalism on the right.

Movies, Censorship and the Law, Ira H. Carmen. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1966. 339 pp. $7.95.

The first part of this book is concerned with the problem of getting movies to be considered seriously and legally as a vital communication media, that is, as entitled to the same protections of free speech enjoyed by speakers and writers, by publishers of books and magazines, by newspapers. A series of cases having tangential effects are quoted and examined to demonstrate the initial difficulty of having that view accepted by the courts.

The injustice of whimsical censorship boards operating according to personal prejudices and exercising prior restraint is examined and a convincing case presented not only for that aspect but also for the added absurdity of film producers being required to pay as they submit films for judgment.

An even more disturbing aspect is that of a few private decisions, individual decision not subject to easy appeal, being used as a powerful weapon to establish which movies the vast majority of Americans shall be permitted to view. Inquisitorial secretiveness always distresses.

Everyone interested in the freedom to form his own opinions and with an interest in maintaining an open "market place of ideas" should add this volume to his reading lists. It is not the final word. It is a sort of history of the development and acceptance of the concept which holds that to attend movies is not only an amusing recreation but can also, if permitted, be a powerful and influential educational experience. Americans are entitled.

Recent action by censors in approving *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* demonstrates how far censorship panels have been forced to move toward a recognition of the living present.

Bernard E. Richardson

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contributors

FREDERICK MARSHALL FINNEY, born in Troy, Alabama, served in the Air Force 1962-1965, and will graduate from Wilberforce University in December, 1966. *The Delta Tractor and Mr. Charley* is his first published work.

MORGAN GIBSON teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and has appeared previously in *Accent, The Massachusetts Review, Choice, Kulchur,* etc.

PATRICIA GOEDICKE has appeared previously in *Kenyon Review, Saturday Review, The Nation,* and elsewhere, as well as in *The North American Review.* She lives in Athens, Ohio, where she collects mushrooms and listens to Victor records.

NOEL J. GORMAN, Jr. is an undergraduate student at the University of Massachusetts.

NORMAN HOEGBERG teaches at Wayne State University in Nebraska. His poems have appeared in *December, Mad River Review* and other magazines.

DAVE KELLY'S work has appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly, Mad River Review,* etc.

From San Diego, BILL (William M.) MURPHY writes, "I have one wife, three kids (a boy, 17, and two girls, 11 and 15) and one dog (8 mos.), all first rate (except the dog, who eats garden hoses). My chief hobbies are swimming, fishing, camping, pipe-smoking, beer-drinking, sex, and buying new garden hoses—not necessarily in that order."

The Nun Who Came In From The Cold is the third appearance of work by FRANCIS MURRAY in *The North American Review.* Other work of his has appeared in magazines ranging from *Saturday Review* to *Nexus,* and he is represented by work in *The Bedside Phoenix Nest* (Ives Washburn, $6.50). An editor, his hobbies are writing and singing and he does volunteer work in New York City hospitals, V. A. hospitals; homes for the aged, blind and handicapped; jails, etc., as a member of a group which gives musical programs for these patients.

JOYCE CAROL OATES teaches English at the University of Detroit. Her third novel, *Upon The Sweeping Flood* (Vanguard Press, 1966), is currently receiving excellent reviews. Shorter work has appeared in *Mademoiselle, Atlantic Monthly, Yale Review, Kenyon Review, Prairie Schooner, Virginia Quarterly,* etc. She is at work on a new novel, *A Garden of Earthly Delights,* which will probably be completed for 1967 publication.

JOHN PAUKER, who runs the Fun House gallery in Washington, D.C., is a poet, playwright, translator, political commentator and novelist. The Stone Wall Press will publish his sequence of poems, *Excellency,* in the near future.

DAVID SONSTROEM teaches at the University of Connecticut. He and Anne, his wife, expect their first child this month.

STEPHEN TUDOR, formerly fiction editor of *The North American Review* and managing editor of the *Northwest Review,* now lives in St. Louis and teaches at Washington University.

A teacher of educational philosophy at the University of New Mexico, ALBERT W. VOGEL'S work has been in *Trace, Quartet,* etc., and numerous critical and professional journals. Also a photographer, his works have appeared as photographic essays, in one-and two-man shows, as covers of publications, and during the past year he has taken more than 1,000 pictures of conditions of poverty in New Mexico for OEO projects.

G. WOSK is a housewife and substitute teacher of English in Evanston, Illinois. She publishes regularly and has an article in the next issue of *December.*

Reviewers: THOMAS B. GILMORE, RUDOLPH C. MUSKA, WALTER BORENSTEIN, BERNARD E. RICHARDSON.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANNOUNCEMENT

We are pleased to announce we have arranged with the publishers to provide in a reprinted, library bound edition, the entire back file of *The North American Review*, 1815-1965.

Please Inquire for our prospectus.

AMS PRESS, INC.

56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED